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Wednesday 19 November 2008

Mercredi 19 novembre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Greffière
Deborah Deller



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 19 November 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 19 novembre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by an Islamic prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES AND INTERIM APPROPRIATION ACT, 2008 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES ET L'AFFECTATION ANTICIPÉE DE CRÉDITS (NO 2)

Mr. Arthurs, on behalf of Mr. Duncan, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 114, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters, to amend the Ottawa Congress Centre Act and to enact the Ontario Capital Growth Corporation Act, 2008 / Projet de loi 114, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions, modifiant la Loi sur le Centre des congrès d'Ottawa et édictant la Loi de 2008 sur la Société ontarienne de financement de la croissance.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate? The member from Pickering-Scarborough East.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I want to just begin by saying it's my intention to divide my time with the Minister of Finance, as the expert in the area.

I'm pleased to rise on third reading of Bill 114 this morning, the fall economic statement. Clearly, this continues to be a time when it's important for us to focus our attention on the economy, on where this province is, and where it's going, along with the provinces across this country, with our neighbours to the south and the international economic situation we're all faced with.

We've been diligent in our efforts to ensure that the province of Ontario has a clear plan in the context of how we see the best means by which to serve this province in an economic fashion. We have a clear plan. We've articulated that on numerous occasions and we'll continue to do so. We seek good ideas. It doesn't necessarily mean that all of the ideas that are presented to us, whether it be in this Legislature or elsewhere, will fit within the context of the plan we have for this province, even as we ad-

just and make the plan work for us here in the province of Ontario.

Bill 114 was our opportunity in this session, during the fall of this year, to put before this Legislature a number of matters of interest to the province, and of fiscal interest to the province as well. Certainly, during second reading in particular, the debate was extensive from all sides of the House. We look forward to continuing that debate this morning.

We are as well, at the same time as we're wrapping up Bill 114 in the House, preparing for our budget, coming in the spring. I know the minister, as well as the Standing Committee on Finance, are in the process of either continuing or starting their tour, as such, to hear from people of Ontario about what it is that folks are looking for in the province, what their priorities are—and at the same time an opportunity for them to express to us whether they feel we continue to be on the right track, or whether they feel we should be shifting course a little bit in that regard. So I know, as one of the members of the Standing Committee on Finance, I'm looking forward to that process, which for us actually begins as early as tomorrow morning at 8:45. That will be the first day of hearings held for the coming budget year. We look forward to the standing committee being able to go through that process, being able to hear from individuals and organizations throughout the province and, at the same time, to report back in that process to this Legislature, so that the Minister of Finance will have that advice in addition to all the other advice that he will have presented to him in the preparation of a budget for the 2008-09 fiscal year.

I appreciate the opportunity to spend a couple of minutes this morning to begin the leadoff on Bill 114. As indicated, my intention, obviously, is to share this time allocated to us with the minister.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I want to begin by thanking my parliamentary assistant, Wayne Arthurs, for all the work he puts into the budget, into the fall statement, into carrying legislation, chairing SCFEA. He takes on an enormous workload, makes an enormous contribution and, like so many members of the Legislature, has enormous input into government policy and helps us as we deal with these very difficult circumstances.

As I said on October 22 when I delivered the fall statement and introduced this bill, it is not business as usual in Ontario. We have seen in the course of the last six weeks developments that I don't think any of us ever contemplated, certainly not in this fiscal year or, for that matter, in any fiscal year. Yesterday, the province of Alberta indicated that their projected surplus has gone

from \$8 billion to \$2 billion in three months as a result of commodity prices. Ontario has been experiencing enormous challenges in its manufacturing and forestry sectors for some time, and we have laid out a plan that is reinforced by this bill and, through a whole number of initiatives, that is designed to deal with the challenges in our economy today.

It's interesting to see how other governments are now talking about the things that we have been talking about for more than a year. To a very real extent, because of the challenges in the manufacturing sector that became evident some time ago, we have had to deal with this reality longer than others. Let's talk about our five-point plan and let's talk about what we're doing.

Infrastructure: It's interesting that the G20 leaders, meeting last week in Washington, all talked about the significance of infrastructure. That is why, last year, we invested \$9.9 billion in new infrastructure, because the beauty of infrastructure is that it creates jobs in the short term and deals with economic productivity, our ability to compete in the world economy, in the long term. Just last week, I know members around the province had the opportunity to bring another \$1.1 billion in money to our municipal partners to help them fix some of their infrastructure and, again, these projects are ready to go and will employ people at this very difficult time in our economy.

Innovation is absolutely essential. I've been watching, over the course of the last 24 to 48 hours, the discussion around the Detroit Three and the debate around support to keep those massive employers operating in the short term. It's interesting that the debate is turning around not just whether or not to help, but if there's help, what do we expect back from them? What we're talking about is innovation. What we're talking about is new product mandates that'll meet the market demands of the 21st century. That's what we've been doing for some three years; first with AMIS, our automotive investment strategy, designing and helping those companies transition into the product mandates that people will demand in the 21st century. So those investments in research and innovation—that's the second component of our five-point plan. Again, we're seeing other governments starting to do what we've now been doing for some years.

0910

We have talked about the need for partnership, the need to work together as a province, a country, to work with our municipal partners. Earlier this spring, I was pleased to assist my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs as we reached an historic agreement with our municipal partners to upload a range of services that were downloaded by the Conservative government. It was the Conservative government that passed down court security costs to municipalities. It was the Conservative government of Mr. Harris and Mr. Eves that downloaded more social welfare costs. It was the Conservative government of Mr. Harris and Mr. Eves that downloaded a range of other costs and a net cost to municipalities that ranged somewhere between \$1.5 billion and \$3 billion.

While they were doing that, they managed to run up a deficit of \$5.5 billion.

We have reversed that. Between our taking office and the fulfillment of the agreements we've reached, we will have uploaded more than \$3.8 billion in costs, which will help manage property tax bills for people across the province. Then, my Conservative friends opposite are voting against initiatives in this bill which will give seniors an enhanced property tax credit, right at the time when we need that kind of stimulative measure as we move forward.

One other thing has happened this week that I think is really instructive. Later today, my colleague the Minister of Economic Development, Mr. Bryant, will be leaving for Washington with Mr. Clement, the federal minister. Three weeks ago, the federal government did not want to partner with us in dealing with the auto sector. I congratulate the Prime Minister, I congratulate Minister Clement, for wanting to work with Ontario for an industry that is not only key to Ontario but key to all Canadians. That is a very positive development.

I remember last spring, or I should say—not even last spring—when I first revealed to the public, once we had numbers that solidified, saying that Ontario will have a deficit this year. We were derided by our Conservative friends opposite that a government running a deficit is a horrible thing. Well, I listened very carefully to Prime Minister Harper and Minister Flaherty, and again I acknowledge what I think has been the right approach by the federal Conservatives, who now seem to get it, who now seem to realize that the challenges in our economy are real and present, and a deficit is actually—and I note the winner of the Nobel Prize in economics this year talked about the importance of deficits at a time like this, the importance of government spending.

We are going to continue to make the kinds of investments we've been making. Clearly, we have to manage that. We have to manage it going forward, but at least the accounting will be accurate, unlike the last Conservative budget that projected a balanced budget and actually had a \$5.5-billion deficit built into it. We actually passed something called the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act as a result of that. The Conservatives voted against that enhanced accountability, and it's that act that requires us to report in a more meaningful way to the Legislative Assembly, number one, and, more importantly, to the people of Ontario.

There is a range of initiatives in here; we've taken steps. I want to congratulate my friend Mr. Prue, the New Democratic Party member who raised an issue about granny flats with us, and I want to take a moment to thank him for that. This bill deals with the issue that he raised in the House, and I congratulate him and thank him very much for bringing this issue to our attention—and I hope he won't vote against it.

The other thing—our friends in the Conservative Party want to give tax cuts to oil companies and big, profitable companies and are going to vote against a tax credit for innovative Ontario firms today. They want to vote

against that. It's okay to subsidize Exxon, it's okay to subsidize all the big oil companies, but they want to cut corporate tax rates that won't benefit Ontario manufacturers—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Cambridge, come to order. Member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, come to order.

Hon. Dwight Duncan:—which is absolutely scandalous and, I think, reflects the fact that the party is without—

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I don't think the minister is speaking to the point of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Well, I'm listening very carefully, and I'll draw his attention to that if I feel so.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This bill deals with appropriate tax cuts, and we reject your wanting to give tax cuts to companies that don't do business—

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: You don't know anything about—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Cambridge, come to order.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I think what we see in the Conservative Party is a complete lack of leadership. One day they want to spend money; the next day they want to cut spending.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: He's not talking to this bill; he's talking about the Conservative Party.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Number one, the member for Cambridge hasn't been recognized by the Chair. Number two, you should take your seat. Number three, I'll listen very carefully to the debate this morning and I'm sure that we'll all learn something from it.

Finance minister.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This is very much about this. This is a budget bill. Perhaps the member hasn't read it. It is about budgetary policy, and what I'm saying is, we reject your ideas and your notions. They are rooted in a failed economic philosophy that has helped to put the entire world economy into the mess we are in today. You have said to cut health care spending by \$3 billion. We reject that. They have called for general, across-the-board tax cuts for corporations that won't benefit the very companies that aren't making money. They will help the oil industry in Alberta, but they won't help the auto industry here in Ontario. We reject that philosophy.

We reject the deregulation attitude that has led to the collapse of banks around the world and is central to Mr. Tory's party's philosophy. We have seen that game play out in Ontario. It left us with a horrible deficit. It left us with undermined public services. We have a plan that is working in spite of the enormous challenges in our economy today.

This bill provides tax relief. This bill provides stimulus. This bill helps maintain jobs in a very turbulent world. This bill deals with issues; as I indicated, Mr.

Prue's issues that were raised in this House. This bill invests in the people of Ontario; it maintains quality health care; it maintains education.

My friends in the Conservative Party will vote against infrastructure today. They will vote against the most innovative tax credit for small businesses around. I regret that they just haven't figured out what's going on in the world today.

As we move forward, as this bill passes today, as we partner with municipalities—and again I want to stress congratulations to the Harper government for working with us on the automotive sector, something that we've been calling for. I am personally pleased that Mr. Clement and Mr. Bryant are taking such an active role in trying to address a very real problem, recognizing that many of our citizens are concerned not only about their jobs but about the impact all of this will have, and making sure that if governments in the United States and Canada are able to come up with a package, it is fair to taxpayers as well as fair to those people who are so directly impacted by the industry.

We will keep investing in infrastructure. We will run a deficit this year.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Uh-oh.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Hudak should listen to Prime Minister Harper, and he should listen to his friend Mr. Flaherty. He should listen to people as divergent as Paul Krugman and George Bush. It's important that the provincial Conservatives and New Democrats get into the real world today—it has changed. Coming from a party that ran a \$5.6-billion deficit in its last year, contributed—

Hon. James J. Bradley: A hidden deficit.

0920

Hon. Dwight Duncan: A hidden deficit—we spoke about that a while ago. There's nothing hidden about what we're doing. We're being open and transparent with the people of Ontario. Let me reemphasize: We will continue to invest in infrastructure. We will continue to protect public services. We will continue to work to green and to update our environment. We will continue to work on innovation. We will continue to build partnerships, whether with the federal government or with our municipal partners. We've all got to work together now, more than ever. That is important. We will continue to offer the kind of targeted tax relief that will actually help manufacturers. We eliminated the capital tax and made it retroactive for manufacturers and our Tory and New Democratic Party members opposite voted against that. It put cash into the hands of those very industries that are struggling. The cash flowed this past summer. It has helped keep people working. It has helped keep production going. It was a stimulus package in the hundreds of millions of dollars. That was in addition to this year's \$3.9 billion in infrastructure.

Our five-point plan continues to be the right plan. We're hearing governments throughout the world, the G20, calling for spending on infrastructure. We're looking at partnerships. For the first time, the G20, the 20

largest economies in both the developed and developing world, are partnering, working together. That is absolutely essential.

Now the debate is around innovation and how do we transform our automotive sector to an industry that will survive and compete and thrive in the 21st century with appropriate product mix? We started that some three years ago. There are many challenges in the economy. This year will no doubt probably be the most difficult year that any of us have ever experienced in our lives. We have laid out a plan that we think is right. This bill provides tax relief. It provides spending stimulus. It preserves our ability to invest in innovation. It builds partnerships, as have been announced. We need this kind of package. We need it today more than we ever needed it. I urge all members of this House to vote in favour of this package, to put aside partisan and ideological differences and recognize the importance of working together. We're pleased to be working with the federal Conservatives on the industrial strategy, on the industrial situation. We look forward to working with all Ontarians and all Canadians in this very, very important endeavour.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I think that the finance minister must have had a couple of different speechwriters there for 90% of his speech—a diatribe that was among the most partisan speeches in some time here in the Legislature, and then the second speechwriter comes on board for the conclusion and talks about reaching across the aisle and being non-partisan. I'm disappointed, I guess, in the tone that the finance minister decided to take on this bill—just when we thought we were seeing a more statesman-like finance minister in the vein of his predecessor, we saw the battled Dwight Duncan with his remarks today.

I won't dwell on it; it's simply reflective. I'd say my friend the Minister of Health—I know he wouldn't bring that kind of tone. He would probably be a little bit chagrined in his remarks with the nature of Bill 114's timeline. Let me give you an example. This bill was part of a rather sharp time allocation motion that ended debate when I think, only a handful of Liberals actually rose to speak on something that the finance minister boasts about as some sort of revolutionary piece of legislation. This bill was ordered referred to committee on November 4, 2008, and amendments were then due by noon of the 5th. Less than 24 hours after the bill was referred to committee amendments were due.

I do plan—and I apologize—to split my time with my good friend the very eloquent member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke

The amendments were due by noon on November 5. The deadline to speak to the committee to apply was 5 p.m. on the 5th and public hearings were limited to one day of deputations only in the morning of November 6. This is where it gets interesting.

People were making their presentations and offering improvements to the bill on November 6, but motions to

amend the bill were due on November 5. So I guess we all needed to hop into Dwight Duncan's time machine to go back 24 hours in order to bring forward amendments that we heard the next day.

Mr. John Yakabuski: H.G. Duncan.

Mr. Tim Hudak: “H.G. Duncan,” my friend says, with his masterful time machine.

That certainly was, sadly, disdainful of any kind of public input on this bill. Today, we are responding to the bill. We have one hour of debate split among the three parties, 20 minutes each, for a bill brought in the day that the Dalton McGuinty government returned to deficit financing in the province of Ontario, projecting at least a \$500-million deficit.

Kevin Gaudet—I'll just read some excerpts from his presentation to the committee—was one of those who was on the ball and able to register to the committee with barely 24 hours of notice. Mr. Gaudet of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation said:

“With respect to Bill 114, although I'm pleased to be here, I must say that the process through which I've come to be here is a little bit disappointing and frustrating. It does provide, I would argue, an undue imposition on the public or organizations when the Legislature does put together such committees and deputations in such a short period of time. We're aware of the existence of the bill, but less than 24 hours' notice for individuals to come to committee is an onerous burden. A lot of people are either unaware or are incapable of making it.

“At the risk of being solely polemic and perhaps a bit philosophical, it's disappointing at a time when, two days ago, we saw important change in our sister country south of us, an opportunity where people reached across the aisle looking for hope and change. There's a concern that I have that this Legislature is becoming increasingly disdainful of the public, and this is an example of that.”

Mr. Gaudet goes on to say, “The last time I was at committee was the health tax review. To call it a review—it's an abuse of the language to have called it a review. The deputations were, at best, heard, if not properly undertaken, and no changes occurred.”

So Mr. Gaudet of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation would certainly take significant issue with the finance minister's conclusion to end partisanship and to get on board, when the government itself has shown—

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's why they brought in that time allocation motion—non-partisan, of course.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Exactly. The time allocation motion was anything but non-partisan.

So Mr. Gaudet is speaking, I think, for the general public here in refuting the minister's argument that this bill has been brought about in a non-partisan fashion.

I know my colleague Mr. Yakabuski wants to bring forward remarks on behalf of his constituents. He has thought heavily about the economy and the impact in his riding and in the province.

We do need to note that at the time when Bill 114 was brought into the Ontario Legislature, the minister had made an announcement, I think that very same day, that

Ontario would be returning to deficit budgets. We would join Prince Edward Island as the only provinces in Confederation running deficits in 2008-09. What's particularly alarming about this is that revenue to the Dalton McGuinty government has increased by some \$28 billion, largely because of increased taxes on working families and seniors in our province, increased taxes on small businesses that are struggling to get by, and increased transfers from the federal government. That's about \$6,100 per household in Ontario, \$28 billion in increased revenue. Let's put that in perspective: \$28 billion in increased revenue is greater than the combined total budgets of all the provinces in Atlantic Canada. You total up Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and PEI's total budgets: \$23 billion. The increase in revenue to the province of Ontario exceeds that by \$5 billion, a \$28-billion total. Another comparison: If you combine the entire budgets of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, they're lower than the total increased revenue to the province of Ontario.

What did Dalton McGuinty's government do? They blew that out the window. They frittered away this massive revenue increase.

Let me give you a few examples of some of that spending: \$2.3 million spent by the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. on the opening gala at Caesars Windsor. No doubt, some members of the Liberal cabinet, decked out in their finery, some in tuxedos, and staff and Liberal hangers-on probably had a good time at the opening of the Caesars Windsor casino—but \$2.3 million in expenditure. And \$8 million as a bit of a going-away gift to former finance minister Sorbara for a tourism study that I'm sure will include a lot of world travel. To his credit, he was the chair of two successful Liberal campaigns. I know he's close to the Premier. But I think an \$8-million expenditure on this when the tourism market is hurting will be at odds with what most people would see as a priority in spending on tourism. Then there's the \$3.5 million spent by the Ministry of Education on hotel and conference facilities, \$6 million to remove the "C" from the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., \$20 million to quietly give raises to appointees to government agencies and boards—I could go on and on.

0930

I bet if you ask the average Ontario family, if you ask a senior in Grimsby or Binbrook if they have seen improvements for the additional \$28 billion in revenue, they'd say, "Far from it." Worse still, under the McGuinty government's failed and outdated tax-and-spend policies, total debt has gone up in the province of Ontario to \$172.3 billion. That's \$13,000 in debt for every man, woman and child in Ontario; and total debt per household has increased under the McGuinty government by almost \$9,000. So in times when revenue is coming in, flooding into the treasury, the Ministry of Finance and the McGuinty government chose to spend at such an alarming rate that it would make Bob Rae blush and have run up the debt by nearly \$9,000 per family.

If you look at the increases in the health tax, electricity, new driver licence renewal charges, delisted

health care services like eye exams and chiropractic care, cancelled tax reductions that were in play, for a typical family in the province of Ontario the cost is some \$2,000 or more, even for some individuals, the increase in costs and expenses as a result of the McGuinty government's decisions in their time in office. Sadly, the failed tax-and-spend policies of the McGuinty government, the outdated philosophy, has now tragically reduced Ontario to have-not status. For the first time in our history, Ontario is receiving equalization payments, the equivalent of welfare payments, the welfare rolls of Confederation. Instead of the Premier calling in his economic minister, saying, "Come hell or high water, I will not allow Ontario to remain a have-not province; we're going to grow our way out of this," it's almost like from the musical *Oliver!*. It's almost like, "Please, sir, may I have another?" with their hand out, continuing to ask for more money instead of trying to grow our economy and restore Ontario's strength as a leader and a job-creation engine in Confederation.

The finance minister improperly, and I think intentionally, mischaracterized our opposition to the bill. We reject the outdated tax-and-spend policies of the McGuinty government that have plunged us further into debt and have restored deficit financing in the province of Ontario, and for the first time in the history of this great country have made Ontario a recipient of equalization payments as a have-not province. They have no plan whatsoever to remedy that tragedy.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to the comments of my colleague from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I do appreciate the comments of my colleague from Niagara West-Glanbrook and also our critic for finance.

What's remarkable is that we are in a time, and the finance minister spoke about it, where the G20 had this conference recently. The issue that everybody is talking about, not just the First Ministers of those countries, but everywhere—you go on the street, and what are people talking about? They're talking about the economy.

But the reality in this chamber is that this government doesn't want to talk about the economy. In fact, they've stifled debate on Bill 114 so that the members of this Legislature cannot talk about the economy. We're down to another eight minutes and 18 seconds to talk about the economy because this government has stifled debate on this bill and brought in a time allocation motion. The newscasts of every evening are talking about the economy and how we might deal with it. But this government doesn't want to talk about it. They want to put their head in the sand and hope that the issue takes care of itself.

Our leader, John Tory, recently proposed some possible solutions that this government could look at, and one of them was getting control of its spending. My colleague Mr. Hudak talked about how this government has been awash in revenue for the last several years and mismanaged it, and now, when the revenue is about to drop, they don't know how to deal with it. And the first

thing they are not doing that they should be doing is getting control of their own spending.

Randall Denley wrote in the *Citizen* this past weekend how other governments understand the reality of the economic situation and they're taking control of it. In your own home, if your revenues drop, if your income drops, you have no choice but to do something about your spending. It's happening all across the province, as people lose their jobs in McGuinty's Ontario. All across the province, people are realizing that they have to do something to deal with their own spending, because the revenue in their personal household is down.

The finance minister talks about our party being in favour of big tax cuts for big oil. How false is that? It's just unbelievable. What our party wants to see is tax cuts that will help all businesses in this province. How about the forestry business, which is in big trouble as a result of your regulatory regime and your tax policy? I asked the Minister of Natural Resources: How about some tax relief so that these companies can get some assistance with transporting their products further away because of the closure of mills under your policies? No go. No help for the forestry industry, and this government talks about trying to assist. The minister said, "We're going to help to try to save jobs in this province." But every month, what happens? The job picture gets more gloomy.

Our party has asked for specific relief for small business, and what do small business and all other businesses in this province get? They get Bill 119, the WSIB bill, which is going to hammer more of them and quite likely put some of them right out of business. But this government continues to spend money on the things it wants to spend on: bigger government.

I want to read what Randall Denley had to say in his column in the *Citizen* this past weekend:

"Harper and his finance minister, Jim Flaherty, were hitting ... the right tone on the key points this week. Harper says he wants to be pragmatic in dealing with the economy.... In have-not Ontario, McGuinty is cheer-leading for the auto sector while doing next to nothing to get his own government spending under control....

"In Ontario, McGuinty has made minuscule cuts in government spending and delayed some expenditures until next year.... It's not nearly enough. As Ontario Progressive Conservative leader John Tory pointed out this week, the provincial government is still conducting its own affairs as if it's business as usual. Despite already being in deficit, the government is looking for 154 new employees, half of them earning more than \$80,000 a year. The government spends \$92 million on travel and \$1.2 million on administration...."

What John Tory proposed was "a public sector hiring freeze, a salary freeze for senior management, a 10-per-cent cut in administrative expenses and a reduction in government advertising. These should be self-evident actions for a government in deficit, but McGuinty hasn't taken them."

This is how the minister opened his address this morning: "Ontario is facing serious economic diffi-

culties." In difficult times, what would be more prudent than to look at where expenses could be cut? But, no, they don't look at that. "Let's hire, bigger offices." How many more people are working in ministers' offices today than five years ago? Exploded—it has exploded. The number of people working in ministers' offices, the Premier's office, is at an all-time high, and this is at a time when the people of the province of Ontario are being faced with: "Are we going to keep our jobs? Are we going to lose our homes? Are we going to be able to pay for the children's post-secondary education in McGuinty's Ontario?" But this government just keeps waltzing along and spending like drunken sailors. My apologies to sailors.

0940

Mr. Tim Hudak: At least they spend their own money.

Mr. John Yakabuski: But at least they do spend their own money.

So how are we going to address this if the government refuses to change any of its behaviour? They're addicted, totally addicted to spending, but they won't get the help they need. When our party talks about sitting down and striking all-party committees to try to work towards solutions on these problems in a non-partisan way, we're scoffed at. We're scoffed at from the other side of the House. They think it's a big joke. "No, no," they say. "No, we've got all the answers."

Well, the people in the province of Ontario beg to differ. They're seeing the evidence of your answers. Just trudge along, doing business as usual, spending, spending, spending, not reining in waste in this government and, as my colleague Mr. Hudak said, a \$28-billion increase in spending in five years—\$28-billion spending, from \$68 billion to \$96 billion. That would be like an individual going from \$68,000 to \$96,000 in their own home. How many people are in a position to have done that? Very, very few in this province. But this government—and whose money do you think it is? It's not coming off trees. It's coming out of the people's pockets.

Now, when this province is in trouble, they're going to continue to try to take it out of the people's pockets. There soon will be nothing left in those pockets but lint. But this government doesn't want to change its behaviour. It's addicted to spending. It has to change that mindset.

We're not talking about shutting things down. There are good programs that need to be supported; we understand that. But the problem with this government is, it wants to buy every vote out there. It wants to buy every vote out there so that by the next election, they've somehow done something to buy each individual vote in the province. It's not going to work. You've got to behave yourselves.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Interesting discussion we just heard from the Conservative Party. It always amazes me: No matter when I've been in this House over the last 18

years, the debate is about the same. Everything is a tax cut, everything is reduction of services, and that's the way you're going to get the economy going.

I think Ontarians, North Americans and the world have come to the conclusion that government does have tools at its disposal and government has to use the instrument of government and its taxation powers in ways that are able to advance our causes within the economy. So I just—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I know. I know you're out of my camp now, Tim, but I just have to open with that.

What's incumbent upon us is that we have a debate here in the House today about how we deal with the problems that we're having in the economy.

The government's got quite a large bill here. There are some things—and I'm going to say it up front—there's some stuff in here that I support, that to me makes some sense. There are other ones that are completely in the wrong direction, and it puts you a bit at a loss in opposition. You wish sometimes that you'd be able to support a bill outright. But such is the government's choice in mixing everything together to make it rather difficult to take a position of supporting the government on their bill.

I just want to say there are things in here that I think are a step in the right direction. Is it the be-all and end-all to dealing with what's ailing our economy? Absolutely not. There are a lot of things that we're missing, and that's what I want to talk about. I don't want to spend my time criticizing the Liberal government. I think the public will decide that in the next election. I want to talk about what it is that we here in this Legislature should be doing in order to advance what's important for Ontarians.

There's one section of this bill, and I think it was not a bad idea, and that's the amendment of section 43.5 around the Corporations Tax Act. Yes, I'm a New Democrat, and I understand that taxation is an issue and an instrument that government has to use in order to assist the economy to rebound. What the government has done here is allow for the refundable tax credit to move from a \$2-million to a \$3-million threshold if they're going to be doing investments basically in research and development, moving into new technologies within their plants. Not a bad thing, but is that really the only thing that needs to be done in order to assist the small business sector, and more importantly, entrepreneurs in this province, to leverage the kind of investment that they need to make in their companies in order to compete in the economy of tomorrow? Here's the problem: Ontario will never be able to compete with China, India or other countries when it comes to a low-wage economy. We all agree with that.

What do we do as a province in order to give our entrepreneurs and our businesses an edge so that they're able to move forward and build the economy of tomorrow? I think what you need to do, and I think most people in the House would agree with me, is to always be one or two inventions or one or two products ahead of

everybody else. Ontario needs to be seen in the world as the economy that is on the cutting edge, that is developing the technologies and products of tomorrow that people want to buy. If we're doing that, then everybody is trying to catch up to us, and it allows us to position our economy in a way of really adding value to what we do in this province and giving entrepreneurs the opportunity to make a few bucks and people an opportunity to get good jobs that pay a good wage in a meaningful career.

How do you do that? I think this bill does some of that, but it doesn't do the kinds of things that need to be done. For example, this amendment around the Corporations Tax Act: Is the \$2-million to \$3-million threshold enough? I say no. I've talked to a number of entrepreneurs over the last couple of months as I run around this province in this leadership contest. What I find is that a lot of people are saying, "The big difficulty that we're having is that we are a cutting-edge company. We have some products that we're working on developing that we're bringing into the market, but we can't leverage the dollars to invest in the research and development necessary to move that product forward as far as development."

Here's the other kicker: Once they've done the research and development—if they're that lucky—how do you capitalize the change in the plant that needs to happen in order to accommodate the production of a new product? You go to the bank. The bank won't lend you money. Certainly the stock market—people are somewhat nervous to put money in the market, especially when it comes to investments like Canadian equities. They're having real difficulty trying to raise the dollars.

I think the corporation tax amendments in here are a step in the right direction, but I think we need to be a lot more aggressive. We need to understand that if we're going to assist the entrepreneurs of the province of Ontario, somebody who says, "I'm prepared to invest in research and development," should be supported to the full extent. In other words, if the person has research and development costs of \$500,000 or research and development costs of \$10 million, we as a province should be saying, "Okay, we understand that, and we are going to give you a tax credit in order to write that off against your corporate tax if you happen to be making any profit. If you're not, we advance it as a credit on your taxes," so that they can offset some of the cost of doing the research and development.

I was talking to somebody—I think it was up in London. They were a small entrepreneur making equipment that monitors pipe construction and how pipes are deployed within industry, making sure that they're to the standard that they need to be for the utilization that they're in. He was just talking about one example. He's developing this new technology that would allow him to position his company in the market with a product that everybody would need, and nobody else has got. The cost of the R&D on that thing, he was telling me, is anywhere from \$5 million to \$7 million. Will this amendment that the government has under the Corporations Tax Act

help? Of course it will, because it will allow him to write off not \$2 million, but \$3 million. But the actual cost is \$7 million. What this gentleman is telling me is, "Allow me to make those investments in R&D. I don't mind paying taxes. I understand as an entrepreneur that a society is basically measured by how we treat each other, and for that to happen, I as a corporate citizen have to pay my fair share of taxes. All I'm asking for is that at the front end, you assist me so that I can position myself to make money so I can pay those taxes." His argument was that we need to have a refundable tax credit similar to what my leader, Howard Hampton, has been talking about for some time, which allows you to basically draw down cash by way of the tax system to be able to invest in research and development. I think that's the key: You tie it to research and development.

The second part is capitalization. What do you do once you've invented the new product that everybody wants, and now you have to invest in your plant in order to be able to bring it into production? There lies the other problem: the capitalization issue. Many entrepreneurs are really cash-strapped. They're basically running on very small margins—some of them are losing money, unfortunately—and they don't have the money to make the investment to produce that new product that will be sold in tomorrow's economy. They need to find ways of being able to capitalize themselves.

0950

One of the things that I've been thinking about for some time, in discussion with people, is that we should, and I propose this as a New Democrat, have a system where we backstop loans; that the provincial government says—and in partnership with the federal government would be even better, but it doesn't mean to say we can't do it if the feds don't jump onside—in a case of bringing new products online, that if an entrepreneur wants to invest the money in their plant to sell that new product, we will allow them to go to a commercial lender, because we don't need to be administering this as a government, and the commercial lender does the due diligence on the loan. And if the loan makes some sense and there's a business plan for this to happen that makes sense and balances out at the end, and if the entrepreneur is able to show that he or she is bringing forward some cash to that investment, the province secures part of that loan in order to give the banks some comfort in being able to advance the money to the entrepreneur.

I'm just going to take a round number. Let's say this investment is \$5 million. The entrepreneur, if he or she mortgages his or her house and goes out and gets some local investments in the community, is lucky to raise maybe a million bucks. Where do you get the other \$4 million? The person goes to the banks in Canada and the banks say, "Oh, we're not doing this; we have very restricted lending policies nowadays."

Why don't we, as a province, say, "We're prepared to backstop some of these loans" so that we'll give the banks some security in the sense that we're prepared to assume a 20%, 25% or 30% share of the liability on the

loan? If the plant is being built somewhere in an economically depressed part of the province, we should increase that percentage so that we don't allow all of the development to happen around the 401, because one of the issues we now have is that the infilling of industry around the 401 is making it unsustainable from an infrastructure perspective. We can adopt a policy that says that if the person wants to invest in Sarnia, Kingston, Sudbury, Timmins or wherever it might be, rather than a 25% security on loan, we'll give the person 35% as an incentive to go there.

There are things that I think could have been done in this bill that weren't done. Quite frankly, the government should have taken the time to listen to what the opposition was saying, but more importantly to what the public was saying, in order to help drive our economy into the next century.

I'm wondering if my colleague wants time on this.

Mr. Paul Miller: No, I'm okay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You're okay? All right, because you're our industry and trade critic, and I know you're very interested in this issue.

So from that perspective, I think the corporate tax changes are okay, but they're not anywhere near what they need to be in order to assist the economy.

As I've travelled around the province—it's an interesting process to run in a leadership campaign, because you get an opportunity to talk to lots of people, not only within your party, but out in Ontario around issues that you're interested in. One of the things that has been coming up more and more as I talk to small business people is, they say, "You know, Gilles, I'm a hard-working person. I've got a small business; I employ a couple of people. My wife and I are working 12- and 14-hours days, and we want to pay our taxes and we want to be good citizens, but I'm tired of the government coming into my business and auditing me four or five times a year for different things."

I was in Ottawa the other day. I was meeting with a small business person, and the person said to me, "You know, at the beginning of the last summer, the WSIB people came into my company"—it was a construction firm—"and basically audited me for workers' compensation to make sure I did the proper remittance." He said, "I don't have a problem. I understand I have to be audited, but as soon as the WSIB people were gone, the federal government was coming in, and they were auditing me on another matter. Now I just got notification that they're going to come in and they're going to audit me for my health tax remittance. For God's sake, why doesn't the government just hire specialized people who basically do auditing and can do the audit once and look at all of it, rather than disrupting the small business person and having them open their books and having somebody there to assist the auditors three, four, five times a year to do what essentially are auditing processes?"

I don't pretend to understand how practical this is. I haven't looked into it in any detail, but it seems to me it's a reasonable thing that we should be looking at and

asking, "Is there any way of amalgamating auditing services for the province of Ontario and possibly the federal government to one audit process?" That we randomly select people whom we think need to be audited, as we do now, or if there's an indication there may be a WSIB problem or a HST problem or whatever it might be—when the auditors go in, they should look at the amalgamated expenditures and revenues of that company and say, "All right, now we're going to report on the overall," so that you don't have a disruption in the small business sector four or five times within a year, sometimes, with various auditors coming in. It seemed to me that that was a pretty reasonable proposal and something that we could have been looking at in this committee in order to, first of all, avoid having the small business person be sidetracked by these audits, but also for us as a government to do more things efficiently. We are really hard-pressed when it comes to having the amount of staff that we need within government to provide some of the services that we do. We might be able to do some reshifting of staff by eliminating the need to have a whole bunch of people in the auditing sections, to amalgamate them under one organization and then redeploy staff into areas that would be of more use for us as Ontarians and as a government.

The other thing that we could have been looking at, and this is something that seems to me to be a bit of a no-brainer, is the situation in the retail sector. One of the really big problems is the collection and remittance of both PST and GST. The rules are sometimes complicated as to what products get charged GST and what products get charged PST. The small business person tries as best they can to figure it out and they hopefully program their cash registers to get it right, but far too often there are problems because tax codes change and the person trying to collect the tax sometimes gets it wrong.

The other problem is that there's a fairly large, onerous responsibility on the small business sector to do, first, the collection of the PST and GST, account for what was collected, deposit it in an account, and then write a cheque every month or every three months, depending on your situation, over to the provincial government for the remittance of PST and GST. Once you've remitted, you then get audited, and far too often, auditors come in—basically the same stories I was talking about before—and find something that's wrong. The small business person now is scrambling because they owe money that they didn't think they owed, and it creates all kinds of hardship on that particular small business.

Why not have an automatic remittance system? It seems to me that in this province today, we have the ability to develop technology that allows the automatic collection of PST and GST through the cash register, so that we as a province put into the software that there's a 7% tax on a chocolate bar, a whatever per cent tax on a pair of jeans, or whatever. When you put that all into the software, then as I go in, as a consumer, and make my purchase, the tax is automatically collected from me. The money from the cash register is then accounted back to the government account, so that there's an automatic

collection in real time of the taxes being paid by consumers. At the end of the day, there's a report to the small business retailer that says, "Here are your total sales for the day. Here is the breakdown of PST and GST that was collected. Thank you very much; you've now paid your bill." It seems to me that it's just a simpler way of doing it, because then we're able to be in control, as a province, of what items are taxed at what rate. There's no error as far as collection, and we get our money right away.

One of the big problems that we have in the PST system—and I think most members who have been here for a while have gotten calls from small business people who are dealing with PST—is sometimes we spend far more money in collection than we get back in remittance when it comes to PST and GST, because sometimes the small business person, and I don't want to say this derogatorily, lacks the sophistication of how to manage the books when it comes to the collection. Sometimes things are done improperly and it causes all kinds of problems for the small business person, and then they owe a big whacking tax bill to the province or the federal government for PST and GST, and it puts them in peril.

We've spent a lot of money trying to do the collection of monies that were paid on goods that were purchased, and it seems to me that there's a simple way of dealing with that, and that is to have an automatic collection system tied to the cash register. You should make it voluntary, I think, at first. You should say that those who want to opt in have an opportunity to do so. The government can subsidize the software and the hardware needed in order to do this collection. I think that as more small businesses were to get into that, they would say, "Heck, it's saving me time from having to collect PST and GST, it's saving me time having to do with how we collect the money and how we account for it and how we pay for it, so now I can spend my time doing what I do best within my small business, and that is running the business that I have."

So I think there are a lot of things that this government could be doing that they're not doing in this particular area.

The last one I want to stop on is the hydro electricity rates. My leader, Howard Hampton, and others in the New Democratic Party have been calling on this government to have an industrial hydro rate. It just astounds me that the Liberal government is stonewalling on this particular issue. I remember Dalton McGuinty and I remember Dwight Duncan when they were in opposition to the Conservatives, when the Conservatives started the deregulation and the privatization of our electricity system. They were apoplectic, they were in orbit, they were opposed to what the Tories were doing, and said that if they were elected government they were going to reverse the harm that was done. They haven't reversed the harm. Quite frankly, they've done a worse job of it than the Tories would have done and they've accelerated the deregulation and part-privatization of the system. The result has been that electricity rates across this province have

skyrocketed, and for many industries where electricity is a large part of doing business it's a huge problem.

If you're in the manufacturing or the resource sector, you probably need to have a lot of electricity to operate your plant, and one of the real advantages Ontario had for many years is that we developed a public electricity system that says, "We will produce electricity and we will sell it at cost to industry and consumers." Why? It will allow investment to flow into Ontario because electricity costs are a big part of doing business. If we can give an advantage to people investing in Ontario by way of saving money when it comes to energy, we can make those investments and have those investments in Ontario in a much more important way.

That was the decision made over 100 years ago and it served Ontario well. Pulp and paper mills sprung up across northern Ontario and southern Ontario. Why? Because we had a good electricity rate as compared to other jurisdictions. Much in the way of the industry that we see has been developed in southern Ontario in regard to the automotive sector and others in the manufacturing sector was set up partly because they were able to get electricity at a much cheaper rate.

I say to this government: You should heed the advice that you're getting, not only from us as New Democrats, but from industry and communities that say electricity is one of the key components to cost and that we need to basically have an industrial hydro rate.

You may not want to believe Howard Hampton, you may not want to believe the New Democrats, but why don't you try the chamber of commerce? For example, the Northeastern Ontario Chamber of Commerce adopted that position as an official policy and are saying, "We are calling on the provincial government to have an industrial hydro rate" for the people that they represent, because they understand that it is one of the key cost factors for many of the businesses in northeastern Ontario. They are saying that we need to have an industrial hydro rate.

The government then says, "Oh, well, that means to say that the consumer will have to pay more as an individual because they will have to offset." Absolutely not—and rubbish. For years we had a public utilities system in Ontario that basically provided electricity at cost, not only to industry, but to the consumer, and ours were amongst the cheapest hydro rates in North America.

Since the Liberals have come to power, electricity rates been raised, not only for industry but also for consumers. So it's not a question of robbing from Peter to pay Paul, it's a question of providing an industrial strategy, an electricity strategy that says, "We will produce electricity at cost as one of the key economic factors in helping to develop a strong economy."

With that, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the vote on this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 3, 2008, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Arthurs has moved third reading of Bill 114, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations

and other matters, to amend the Ottawa Congress Centre Act and to enact the Ontario Capital Growth Corporation Act, 2008. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This vote will be deferred until after question period this morning.

Third reading vote deferred.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Orders of the day? A point of order? No?

There being no further business, this House is recessed until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1004 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'd like to introduce, in the east members' gallery, Mr. Tim Armstrong from the great riding of Oak Ridges–Markham, father of page Amanda.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I want to introduce, in the west gallery, Jordy Smyth, paramedic and member of CUPE 416.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to take the opportunity to introduce some students from OUSA, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, who are present with us in the members' gallery.

ORAL QUESTIONS

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Robert Bailey: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Bill 119, which you are ramming through this House, will require small business owners in the construction industry to pay WSIB premiums for themselves and their office staff, even though they may never set foot on a construction site. Can you explain to this House how this is going to improve workers' safety?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to my good friend: I would hope that he would understand the value of fairness and a balanced playing field when it comes to business. I would hope that he would understand the value of safety when it comes to our workers. I want to ask the member—I don't know if he has spoken to the leader of his party, because here's what the leader of his party had to say to the—

Interjection: What's that guy's name?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: That guy's name is John Tory and here's what he had to say to the Interior Systems Contractors Association of Ontario just this past spring. He said he understood the need to be able to bring forward mandatory coverage within the construction sector. So they've written him back just recently, and they say, "I am very disappointed in you, John. You released, for

you flip-flopping and changing your decision, a reversal of a position that you brought forward”—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Well, Minister, I'm not going to ask questions of people that aren't here today; I'm asking this question of you. Why don't you just admit that this bill has nothing to do with workers' safety? It's a tax grab, plain and simple, and so many small business owners who have joined us in this gallery today—they're here to tell you that this new tax is going to put them out of business and their employees out of a job. Minister, can you tell these hard-working job creators, the backbone of Ontario's economy, why you have silenced them by limiting debate and refusing to hear them at committee?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Again, if passed, this legislation would help level the playing field in the construction industry and will be good for construction employers and employees.

Now let me get back to your leader. Here's what they had to say to your leader: "You have now completely reversed this position," Mr. Tory, "which is unacceptable. Our members feel that you have neglected to fully honour your commitment and they are questioning their support" or any support "of your party. It is our fear that your objectivity has been clouded"—clouded—by different stakeholders.

"We are encouraged by the minister's announcements on Bill 119 and I think this will help our 10,000 construction workers."

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Minister, these small business-people that are here today are not the only ones who object to this new \$11,000 tax grab by you and your ministry. This list also includes Mark Marmer of Signature Electric in Don Valley East, Christine Crewe of G&C Roofing in Brant, the Greater Barrie Chamber of Commerce and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. These business owners want you to know that they already have insurance, more than adequate, that costs less and provides far more coverage than the WSIB. So Minister, if you're going to require them to have insurance, why don't you give them a choice?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to the member opposite, I don't know who's speaking for that party. You hear one thing in the spring from Mr. Tory; now you hear another thing from the member from Sarnia-Lambton.

The member from Sarnia-Lambton has been reading some letters and comments into the record here. I would like to read him one from one of his constituents. Let's look at what Doug Chalmers, the director of Aluma Systems has to say. Well, Doug says, "Congratulations! Absolutely brilliant. This will make Ontario a safer workplace and improve the quality of life for all of us."

Maybe this member is unaware that we've had many tragic stories of construction workers who are not insured and find themselves dealing with a lot of hardship. We

want to make sure that they are taken care of, that they're safe and that we level—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Premier, and it's on the same issue, Bill 119.

Premier, in June this year, you said, "Listen, why would you raise taxes in a time of economic challenges? Is there anybody that supports that? Not even the NDP support that." Now, five short months later, at a time of widespread uncertainty about the economy and where it's headed over the next few years, hundreds of thousands of jobs already lost and many more in jeopardy, your government, through Bill 119, is imposing up to a \$11,000 tax on small businesses.

Why in the world, in this environment, would you, as Premier, given your own words in June, allow this bill to go forward?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this. The spirit that informs this bill is one of fairness and safety for our workers, and we also want to be fair, given the economic context. That's why we have delayed costs until 2012. My friend is not suggesting, I am sure, that somehow the global economic crisis will continue to prevail until 2012. We are confident that the economy will be much stronger by then. That's why we have taken the prudent measure to ensure that costs don't arise until four years from now.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Well, the bottom line is that the Premier's words and \$1.50 might buy you a cup of coffee. That's a reality.

This new tax can't be justified on any common sense grounds, and as a result, the government has cut off debate and limited public hearings. In the Ontario Chamber of Commerce's response to this new tax, they state, "At a time when Ontario's economy is in turmoil, an added expense can, without a doubt, impact an employer's ability to continue to operate." That's what they're talking about with respect to this new tax. The chamber, the CFIB and hundreds of small businesses have warned you of the dangers of this legislation, yet you continue down this road. What's the real reason you're doing this? What's really behind this? Let's hear about it.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, this is about making sure Ontario workers have the protection they need if they get injured on the job. It's about bringing more fairness into the sector as a whole.

I think it's worthwhile listening to the words of the president of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations, Mr. Ian Cunningham, who said, "This is a timely issue, as the construction industry is actively seeking to proactively improve workplace safety across the industry and address the often thorny issue of coverage for independent operators."

I think it speaks to fairness; it speaks to safety for our workers. And we've taken the economic circumstances

clearly into account by ensuring they don't kick in until four years from now, in 2012.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The sad and, in many respects, disturbing reality is that there is no justifiable, or in our view, legitimate reason for this bill. Perhaps the truth can be found with the list of witnesses the government has chosen to hear from on this bill: the Ontario Pipe Trades Council, who donated \$400,000 to Working Families; the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council—a fellow by the name of Pat Dillon, their manager and a principal of Working Families; the council's director of government regulations, who doubled as a CFO for Working Families.

Premier, why do these unions take priority over the hundreds of thousands of small businesses who are the backbone of this province's economy? Why are you doing this?

1040

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: When we received complaints as a result of retroactively cutting capital taxes for Ontario businesses, when we received complaints for doing something which was pretty well without precedent, I don't recall the leader of the official opposition standing up and saying, "This is unfair to the labour community, and if there's any money available, you ought to be putting it into the labour sector."

What we're trying to do is to be fair here. What we're trying to do is to be fair to all people working in the industry, we're trying to be fair to all employers working in the industry, and we're trying to be fair given our economic circumstances. That's why we have delayed implementation, from a financial perspective, until 2012. I think that is fair. Just as we were fair when we retroactively cut capital taxes for business, we also think it's fair—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. New question.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: A question to the Premier: Just a couple of years ago, the McGuinty government said that its auto sector strategy was going to guarantee the jobs of General Motors workers across Ontario. Since that time, we've witnessed the loss of thousands of jobs at General Motors. Today, the Premier is saying, "I think there is something else we need to grab hold of here. I think we're going to end up with a smaller auto sector in the province of Ontario. I think we're going to end up with fewer jobs than we have at present in the province of Ontario" in the auto sector.

Premier, your government, the McGuinty government, has had five years to reposition the auto sector in this province and ensure sustainable jobs. I want to ask this: What have you been doing over the last five years? You've had lots to say, but now we see fewer and fewer jobs and the risk of losing thousands more.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My colleague knows of some of our genuine successes in a very troubled time for the global auto sector. He knows that we turned 500 million public dollars into leveraging \$7 billion worth of new investment. We have created or secured thousands of jobs. He's also very much aware, I know, of the global economic crisis, which is having an influence on us, and I think he's also aware of the fact that there is an excess of capacity in the North American market, particularly when comes to the Big Three. We learned in the newspaper yesterday that if we shut down all of the Ontario production alone, there would still be excess capacity in the North American market.

That's why we're at the table working with the federal government, and with the Americans now, to ensure that we are not disadvantaged as a result of the continuing restructuring.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government wants to talk as if somehow what's happening here is a surprise. The fact of the matter is that this has been a continuing issue for five years. Just a couple of years ago, the McGuinty government was patting itself on the back and saying, "Oh, we're moving ahead, and this is going to guarantee jobs" and you were shovelling hundreds of millions of dollars out the door to auto companies.

My question is this: While the McGuinty government was shovelling that money out the door, why didn't you insist that products like more energy-efficient cars would be produced in Ontario's plants? Why didn't you insist on some job guarantees in return for the hundreds of millions of dollars that the McGuinty government shovelled out the door?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm trying to figure out where the leader of the NDP stands on this, because some days he's telling us that we should avoid any kind of financial association with the Ontario auto sector. He talks about shovelling money out the door in support of our auto sector, in support of those 400,000 Ontario jobs, in support of those 12 Ontario communities, in support of an industry that benefits the nation as a whole—he refers to that as "shovelling."

We are going to continue to work hard and well with the federal government, with the Ontario auto sector, with the CAW. We're going to work as hard and as well as we can with the Americans now to ensure that as this restructuring continues, we are not disadvantaged here. We want to build a strong foundation that shows great promise for the future. I am confident that we will get this right and that those 400,000 working in this industry—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, I'm concerned about your track record. I'm concerned that companies like General Motors have got close to \$200 million and there was no guarantee of more energy-efficient cars or trucks in Ontario; that the General Motors half-ton plant is being closed and moved to Mexico. I'm concerned that this is a government that has boasted over and over again

that it has a strategy for the auto sector and all we're seeing is the loss of thousands of jobs.

Given your track record over the last five years, why should Ontario workers in the auto sector have any confidence in the McGuinty government now?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm going to be meeting with the leader of the CAW shortly. I had the opportunity to meet with representatives of our auto sector, the Detroit Three, and Honda and Toyota. I've had an opportunity to talk to the Prime Minister about this. Ministers Bryant and Clement are in Detroit, and shortly they'll be going on to Washington.

I'll put our record as a government up against any American state. You should ask them what they think of Ontario and the fact that we remain, now, for five years running, the number one producer of vehicles in North America. Ask them what they think about us landing \$7 billion worth of new investment in the last five years. I'll put our record up against anybody else's.

What's at stake right now is the future of the sector. There are some important questions yet to be answered in this regard. We will keep working hard and well with all concerned. We will build a solid foundation that shows great promise for the future of the auto industry in the province of Ontario.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: What Ontario workers have seen is that as the McGuinty government continues to talk, thousands more workers lose their jobs.

To the Premier: It's not just the auto sector that's in serious trouble. Four years ago, five years ago, the forest sector came here to Queen's Park and said to the McGuinty government, "Your electricity policy is going to drive thousands of forest sector jobs out of this province." The McGuinty government said, "You don't know what you're talking about." Well, here we are now, and Ontario has virtually the highest industrial hydro rates in Canada and, no surprise, thousands of forest sector jobs have been lost.

Premier, here's your track record: You preside over the loss of thousands of jobs in the forest sector; now you preside over the loss of thousands of jobs in the auto sector. Why should any worker in either of those sectors have any confidence in anything that the McGuinty government says or promises?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, it's hard to keep up with the leader of the NDP in terms of his shifting views on these kinds of issues. One of the things that he is talking about now is that we should be subsidizing electricity prices, but this is what he has said in the past: "Industrial energy price subsidization can be attractive in theory, but tricky in practice.... I think it far better to work with industry to lower its energy costs through greater efficiency, not through a scheme of subsidized rates." He put that in his book *Public Power*. He was right at that time. That's the kind of policy that we have adopted. That's the kind of thing that we'll continue to

do, working hand in hand with the forestry sector in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: A thoughtful industrial hydro rate has nothing to do with subsidization. A thoughtful industrial hydro rate has everything to do with valuing good manufacturing jobs.

Let me give you an example of what's happening. This is the example, again, from Dryden, Ontario, one of the most modern paper mills in all of Canada. It's had over \$3 billion of new investment in the last 15 years, but the mill is now shut down. Meanwhile, the company that shut it down is going to operate 10 uncoated free-sheet paper mills of the same kind in the United States. How could that happen, Premier? No mill in Ontario providing uncoated, free-sheet paper, which is photocopy paper, but 10 of them continue to operate in the United States. How could that happen, Premier? What's the explanation of the McGuinty government?

1050

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Thank you very much to the member for the question. Without doubt, we've been giving \$146 million in electricity rebates to the major paper and pulp companies in Ontario. The reason for that was to help them deal with pulp, because it's an expensive product to produce.

If you read what they are saying when these companies are closing down for long, short or permanent periods of time—and they are doing it in Newfoundland, they are doing it in BC, they are doing it in Quebec—electricity isn't the issue. They do not have a market for their products.

They are speaking about inventory, they're talking about liquidity, and they're dealing with a worldwide crisis in the forestry sector. The challenges we face here in Ontario are being faced right across the world in terms of dealing with the forestry sector. There isn't the market for the products. They're going through the transition. They know they have to deal—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I think the minister, again, demonstrates what planet the McGuinty government isn't on.

The fact of the matter is, world newsprint consumption is going up, but newsprint mills in Ontario are shutting down. The fact of the matter is, there are 10 mills producing photocopy paper in the United States now, all owned by Domtar, and they don't operate one mill in Ontario. The fact of the matter is, no paper machines have been shut down in Manitoba, no pulp machines have been shut down, but more than 10 machines have been shut down in northwestern Ontario.

I say again, why should any forest sector worker have any confidence in what the McGuinty government says when your track record is destroying literally thousands of jobs, month after month, mainly across northern On-

tario? Why should anyone have any confidence in what you say or promise now?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: We have flowed over \$407 million to the forestry sector to help them deal with challenges that they're facing. Whether it's the uptake of the roads for primary roads for logging, whether it's putting through additional prosperity fund grants for added value marketing or for new—

Mr. Howard Hampton: While mills shut down.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Excuse me—or for new saws for mills. The fact of the matter is that if the member would do a little better research, he would actually find out that since the Olympics ended in Beijing, the worldwide paper total has gone down—not up, but down.

So what we're doing is working with the forestry companies, not the rhetoric that you hear from across the floor, sitting down and talking about how we move two years, three years from now into a viable, sustainable industry.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have representatives of the Muskoka Builders' Association—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Question?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's to the Minister of Labour, Speaker.

I'm pleased to have representatives of the Muskoka Builders' Association in the public gallery today. Their president, David Nodwell, wrote to you about Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act. He's here today so you can answer his question for a change.

Mr. Nodwell writes, "We are deeply concerned with the extension of mandatory WSIB coverage to partners, executive officers and owners. Currently key company personnel carry private insurance." He goes on to say, "...are owners really likely ever to make a claim when doing so would raise the premiums they would have to pay for their company." He's also very concerned about the speed that this bill is moving through the legislative process.

Minister, if you're not going to implement this bill for three years, why won't you allow the committee to travel the province and hear the concerns of construction businesses like those behind me in the gallery today?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I, too, welcome the Muskoka builders and thank them for being here and for their consultation on this very important piece of legislation.

For 15 years, this piece of proposed legislation has been debated. The last consultation process took place in 2006.

We often forget why we're doing this, but we're doing it for those construction workers. We want to make sure that they are safe in the workplace. We've seen too many serious injuries. We've seen fatalities. We want to make sure that they are insured, that their families are taken care of and that there is fairness, but also, during these consultations, as well as now in committee, we are always open to strengthening the legislation to make sure

that we get it right so that we can close the loopholes of misclassification of workers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Minister, small business people take pride in doing business the right way. As a construction-related association, they place health and safety as a top priority. The underground economy is a concern to them and they would welcome changes that address this issue, but this bill doesn't.

Minister, about a third of the members of the Muskoka Builders' Association took a day off work to come down here. They are obviously very concerned about your bill. They are asking you to take the time to get this bill done the right way. They are very concerned about the lack of specifics in your bill, so maybe you could actually answer President Nodwell's question, which is, "What specific mechanisms exist in this legislation that will reveal underground operators?" And he is here today.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I can tell the member, the Muskoka builders and all construction workers is that this proposed piece of legislation will close those loopholes. It will not allow people to misclassify workers. It will make sure that companies don't under-report the number of employees that they have and that they all pay their premiums, because we want to have a fair, level playing field.

Let me read you a story of somebody who was hurt on the job site, a fatality. One example comes to mind, a construction worker who left behind a spouse and children. He died from a fall, but he did not have optional WSIB insurance. That means his spouse and children were not entitled to lump sum benefits, reimbursement for burial expenses—they wouldn't receive those from the WSIB during that very difficult time. This will address that. The spouse and young children also have not received the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. The 10 highest salaries for university presidents range from \$311,000 to \$504,000 a year. The top 10 payouts when they leave range from \$360,000 to \$1.3 million, and these numbers do not include the allowances for residence, cars, and clubs.

When students are struggling with rising tuition and crippling debt, how does the minister justify these kinds of salaries and payouts to university presidents?

Hon. John Milloy: I'm pleased to answer a question about student assistance and support for students. I feel the member's question may have been prompted by the presence of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance here today, who are joined by the college student association. I had a very productive meeting with them yesterday.

The McGuinty government is very proud of what we've done in terms of student assistance. With the intro-

duction of the Reaching Higher plan, \$1.5 billion of it was earmarked specifically for student assistance. We've doubled our investments in student aid since 2003-04. We're helping 150,000 students per year with financial assistance. We've tripled the number of grants available to students. Right now, one in four students—approximately 120,000—receive non-repayable grants, and we've increased OSAP maximums by 27%—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I know the minister has a Ph.D. and he would have understood my question. He didn't answer my question. These salaries are just not right. The Premier makes \$200,000 a year, and he gets beaten up here every day answering our questions.

Tuition is going through the roof, we don't have enough full-time professors, our class sizes are just too high, and your government just hands out tax dollars to universities and lets them do whatever they want with them. Universities are not autonomous; they are public institutions and they answer to you.

When will your ministry do its job and impose limits on these contracts that are being given to university administrators?

1100

Hon. John Milloy: The issue at hand is making sure that post-secondary education is affordable for Ontario students. Since we've come to power, we've significantly increased per-student funding to both college and university students. Colleges have seen a 43% increase, universities a 25% increase.

Let me continue with some more statistics for the member. Recently, we introduced a \$27-million distance grant which will benefit 24,000 students, assisting with transportation costs for students in remote and rural areas. We've limited students' annual repayable debt to \$7,000 through the Ontario student opportunity grant.

Mr. Speaker, I will put our record up against theirs any day. Let me remind him of theirs. They cut student aid by nearly 50%. They cut funding to post-secondary education. They promised to eliminate tuition, then freeze it. Instead, they increased tuition fees by—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The Member from Algoma-Manitoulin.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I have a question for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I know that this government has been working hard to increase access to health care. Today, 630,000 more Ontarians have access to a family doctor than did in 2003. But there are still Ontarians left without access to a family health care provider.

I know the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care recently travelled to northern Ontario, a region where there is significant demand for family doctors. While he was there, he announced the expansion of an innovative program which is currently providing Ontarians increased access to care. Can the minister tell the House

how he is helping unattached patients in northern Ontario get the health care that they need?

Hon. David Caplan: I'd like to thank the member from Algoma-Manitoulin for his advocacy in this area, and I'm proud to tell the House that we have issued a call for proposals for three new nurse-practitioner-led clinics in the Sault Ste. Marie and Erie St. Clair local health integration networks, and in the North West Local Health Integration Network. Nurse-practitioner-led clinics are an innovative way to improve access to high-quality care. Nurse practitioners are able to treat common illnesses and injuries, and they can write prescriptions and order lab tests and X-rays, among other things. Through collaboration with physicians and other health care partners, these new clinics will focus on chronic disease management and prevention, as well as health promotion.

It's a model that's already working incredibly well in Sudbury, the home of Canada's first nurse-practitioner-led clinic. Already, the Sudbury clinic is providing primary care to nearly 2,000 Ontarians who otherwise wouldn't have access to family care. This is an innovative model. It is something that I'm very proud of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I'm glad to hear that the Sudbury clinic has increased access to health care for Ontarians in need. Still, I'm hoping that the Minister of Health will be able to elaborate further on the effectiveness of nurse-practitioner-led clinics. Some say that these clinics reduce the likelihood of further investment in the province's family health teams. I ask the Minister of Health to address these concerns. How can he be sure that nurse-practitioner-led clinics are effectively delivering health care to Ontarians?

Hon. David Caplan: That is an excellent question. First of all, I would like to say that I'm extremely proud of what our first nurse-practitioner-led clinic has accomplished in Sudbury. I know that members from the Sudbury area share that view. Moving forward, we will evaluate the clinics' performance to find the best practices and identify ways that we can improve the model. But I'm sure of this: Nurse practitioners deliver high-quality care and effective quality care for Ontarians. They are an integral part of our vision for the health care of Ontarians.

Our plan is not a choice between two models of care. We are committed to creating another 50 family health teams, which will bring our total to over 200 teams. This plan complements our commitment to opening a total of 25 nurse practitioner clinics right across the province of Ontario. Both initiatives are part of our family-health-care-for-all strategy, a strategy that aims to improve—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Over the past two committee days, as a result of you shutting down public debate on Bill 119, we heard

from a small number of groups. Over half of them were union representatives, each of which has made significant donations to the Ontario Liberal Party, and the Laborers' International Union of North America—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just caution the member on where she may be going with this question and remind her of standing order 23(i).

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Laborers' International Union of North America was invited by you to speak to the committee, a union that supports the Working Families Coalition. Minister, can you tell the people in the gallery today why the Ontario Liberal Party's website is advertising a \$3,000-per-table event hosted at this union's main hall in Hamilton on December 2?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to the member—maybe she has not heard me here in this House—that this proposed piece of legislation is about fairness, levelling the playing field, and the safety of our construction workers.

I know that your leader—I hope you can find him—got it right at one point this past spring when he said and he understood—and let me read you something from some comments from an association, what they said about John Tory: "I understand that he insists that a level playing field should be created throughout the bidding process, and that any unfair advantage to the underground economy should be eliminated."

I would hope that the member would speak with John Tory so she can get an understanding of why it's important to bring forward this proposed legislation.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Minister, you can't duck and dodge. Construction workers are already covered by WSIB, so there's no valid reason for this bill.

The International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, which you invited to present at committee, refers to itself as a special-interest group that strongly supports Working Families Coalition. Another invitee of yours, the Ontario Pipe Trades Council, in their presentation, referred to non-union construction businesses as "unscrupulous" and non-union apprenticeships as "so-called apprentices."

Minister, do you agree with the Ontario Pipe Trades Council, which gave Working Families Coalition \$400,000 in 2007? Do you think that non-union small businesses are unscrupulous, and do you think that non-union apprentices should be referred to as "so-called"? Because, certainly, one of your generous friends thinks so.

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I believe is that we should take care of those hard-working men and women in construction—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the members to allow the minister to answer the question. I'm asking difficulty hearing his answer.

Minister?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: As I said, we should make sure that those men and women in the construction industry are taken care of, that their safety is taken care of.

Your leader assured the construction industry in the spring of 2007 that he understood that the WSIB reform was essential to the health of the construction industry.

What I can tell you is the McGuinty government, through ReNew Ontario, is investing \$30-billion-plus in infrastructure. The people who build that infrastructure are those men and women. We want to make sure that the businesses are on a level playing field and those men and women—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: To the Minister of Community and Social Services. Government members have accused me of fearmongering, whistle-blowing, and using grandparents raising their grandkids as a political football, having you believe that I fabricated the eligibility changes to the temporary care assistance program. The fact is that grandparents came to me for help, and I brought their concerns forward. If this is being a whistle-blower, I'm proud to be one.

I will ask this minister once again: Will she come clean to all the members of this House that she's cutting off temporary care assistance to grandparents who are raising their grandkids?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I think that it's important to reiterate what temporary care assistance is. Temporary care assistance is a program that is offered to provide financial support to non-parental caregivers who are temporarily caring for a child that they have no legal obligation to support. This could be grandparents, aunts and uncles, neighbours, friends, for example, caring for a child that the parents are not able to care for because they're being hospitalized—for different reasons; they could be subjected to domestic violence and drug addiction. This program is offered to support those people.

This government is very pleased to be supportive, and every year we increase the budget. When we came into power, the budget was reduced by the previous government. We increased it from \$8 million to \$12 million, and we will—

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: Yesterday, the minister stood up in this House and said: "The people who are looking after children who are in need today will continue to receive the support that this government is offering." I'll let the House be the judge of this statement.

We have word today, Minister, that Brant county grandparents are the next to be completely cut off from temporary care assistance. Brant's director in charge of temp care met with grandparents last week in her area and informed them that not one of them meet the minister's new eligibility criteria and they will be cut off in the new year. Both the minister and the PA have said that grandparents should expect no changes to their

assistance. Tell us how many more grandparents raising their grandkids should expect to ring in the new year cut off?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It's very unfortunate that this member is telling—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It is very unfortunate that this member is telling grandparents that they're going to lose their temporary care assistance. This is not true. Those people who are eligible today will be—

Mr. Paul Miller: Resign.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just remind, and I've reminded the honourable member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek on a number of occasions, about personal comments directed at individuals. I just ask you to be cautious of your comments.

Minister?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It's very unfortunate. I will repeat it in this House: The grandparents that are eligible today will be eligible tomorrow. This member brought grandparents to my parliamentary assistant's office and you know what, Mr. Speaker? None of them have been cut off. He's scaring the grandparents off and it's very unfortunate. This program has been in place for 30 years and will continue to be in place.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. I know that modernizing Ontario's Mining Act has been a priority for this government. Minister, I understand that since formally launching this process in July, you have held a number of public and stakeholder consultations as well as a series of workshops with First Nations and organizations, and meetings with tribal councils. These consultations and workshops were originally to wrap up on October 15, with legislation being introduced in December this year. However, last week, your ministry announced the second extension in the dialogue process. Minister, please tell the House why it is important to extend the deadline for a second time, how it will affect the industry, and if the government will be able to keep its commitment of having new Mining Act rules in place in 2009.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you to the member for Huron–Bruce for the question. Of course, the member is the MPP for North America's largest salt mine, so thank you very much for your great support.

After ongoing concerns were expressed by First Nations communities and their leadership, my ministry, along with the significant involvement of my colleague, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, was able to come to an agreement with our First Nations partners to extend the consultation period to January 15, 2009. We believe this extension will allow First Nations communities more time to discuss, consider and provide input on their position regarding changes to the Mining Act.

We believe this extra time is extremely important in order to achieve effective and appropriate legislation.

During this time, as well, we will continue our outreach with industry and we will welcome additional input from them and other stakeholders. This extension will not affect our overall time line, though. We still plan to introduce legislation in the spring session of the Legislature and we still propose that the new rules—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Thank you, Minister, for elaborating to the House on the extension of the consultation process of the Mining Act review. Minister, I know that over the past several years our government has been working very hard to continually improve relationships and our engagement with aboriginal people. Your ministry has done so by responding to First Nations' concerns over consultation time lines about this review. Could you please, Minister, elaborate on how First Nations and organizations across Ontario have responded to the extension of the consultation process of the Mining Act review?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm pleased to stand in front of you today to say that we listened, we respected and we responded. I think it may be safe to say that in previous governments of all stripes, when issues like these were raised by First Nations, they probably would not have been taken so seriously. We believe in this new relationship, and we've demonstrated that by respecting the concerns expressed by the First Nations. I don't expect unanimity with the 133 chiefs across Ontario, but I believe that this gesture of goodwill and government-to-government respect will help lead us to a position on the Mining Act that can be acceptable to the First Nations, the government of Ontario and the mining industry.

We have found the responses from the First Nations leadership to be supportive. I want to thank Regional Chief Angus Toulouse and Grand Chiefs Beaucage, Kelly and Phillips for their efforts and leadership. I'll do my best to ensure that their voices are heard both in this process and throughout the government of Ontario.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE BOARD

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a simple and direct question for the Minister of Labour: What is the current value of the unfunded liability at the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: The member may be aware, or not, that the WSIB is an arm's-length agency of the Ministry of Labour. They are the fourth-largest insurance company in all of North America. They do have a large fund, and they do have an unfunded liability. They do have a plan to reduce that liability, although all of us in this House know with our own—my own personal RRSPs have gone down 20-odd per cent; there are many different funds. The WSIB works diligently on reducing that unfunded liability. They have a financial committee in place that works on it, and I know that they will

continue to be diligent about their work on that plan to reduce that unfunded liability.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm shocked to learn that the Minister of Labour does not know what the level of unfunded liability is in the province of Ontario.

Employers and workers know that an unfunded liability at the WSIB means the board does not have enough money set aside to pay its future obligations. It means higher premiums down the road or reduced benefits for injured workers, or both.

This government is circumventing normal debate, trampling on democracy, ramming Bill 119 through this House, bringing in a new job-killing tax on small business, sending the wrong signal in a time of economic crisis. At the same time, they're playing a shell game with the board's investment portfolio at a time when the stock market has lost 30% of its value this year alone. It all adds up to irresponsible financial management that is unsustainable.

When will the minister acknowledge the concerns of small business, withdraw Bill 119, and table a credible long-term plan to pay down the unfunded liability at the WSIB?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: First, I'll speak to the WSIB as an agency of the Ministry of Labour. The WSIB has been around since 1914, almost 100 years. They have a legacy of protecting workers, but also working with employers. The WSIB meets both with employers and employees to decide on their premiums, to make sure that it is done in a balanced way, to make sure that there is stability—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I warn the member from Renfrew that his comments have been a little loud, and it's very difficult—please consider that as a warning.

Minister?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: —and to make sure that there is fair and reasonable compensation for injured workers and financial stability for employers. That's what they do.

We believe that workers should have that safeguard of WSIB coverage. We will continue to work with them to make sure that they address any financial—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Will the minister explain to this House why he is allowing the erosion of resources for services to children with complex disabilities in Sarnia-Lambton?

Hon. David Caplan: I don't believe that the premise of the question is correct. In fact, we're seeing an increase in resources in our health care system—over \$11 billion, a 37% increase. If the member has some information to share, I think she should perhaps correct her record and not create the impression that there has been

an erosion of resources but rather, under this government, there has been a significant increase in resources.

This has been one of the achievements of this government, that we have been able to whittle down a \$5.5-billion deficit that was hidden, that was left behind by the previous government. But because of recent economic—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: On a point of order—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The honourable member from Nepean-Carleton knows that we generally are not raising points of order in question period.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment she just made.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I withdraw.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, the minister should know that last night, parents in Sarnia-Lambton met to object to the government's cut-throat bidding process that caused the CCAC's decision to eliminate speech and occupational therapy and physiotherapy services, provided by Pathways Health Centre for Children, for kids with disabilities. This means a difficult transition for those children and breaks their continuity of care, the familiarity and quality of services that they have been receiving through Pathways, some of them since they were born. Pathways is being forced, in the meanwhile, to terminate staff at a time when waiting lists for these kinds of services are growing longer and longer.

Rather than shirking responsibility, will the minister respond to the parents' concerns and move to fund and protect the Pathways program in Sarnia-Lambton?

Hon. David Caplan: Unfortunately, the member presents false and inaccurate information. I understand that the community—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It goes both ways within this House. Stop the clock for a moment, please.

It's one thing to be making a comment. But to start to impute motives one way or the other—it's not helpful for trying to maintain decorum in this House. I just ask all members to be a little conscious of the language that they use, because you can see how it causes disruption within this chamber.

I would hope that members would have listened to all the speeches yesterday in Ottawa about trying to bring decorum. We've been doing very well but today we just seem to be losing it a bit.

Minister?

Hon. David Caplan: I understand that the community care access centre has selected a new service provider—which was providing subcontracted services for Pathways—and that the transfer of providers will take place by early December; that there will be—and I want to be categorical—no break in service for the children, and they will most likely maintain the same speech pathologist.

We are going to continue to support Pathways Health Centre for Children in their role as a children's treatment centre to provide kids with the support that they need.

We are working diligently to provide greater access to services for special-needs children and youth and reduce wait times for those services.

Unlike what the member has indicated earlier, these are the real facts: that we have increased funding for CCACs by—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Minister, will you release the impact cost analysis that should have been prepared before you introduced Bill 119, and make public what these changes will mean to the thousands of small businesses across Ontario?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I can tell the member is, what this will mean is that we will safeguard thousands of construction workers who today do not have insurance coverage. What I can tell the member is that the revenue leakage to the WSIB that is happening will be curtailed. What I can tell the member is that those good players, the good businesses that are paying their premiums, will have a level playing field. That's what we're working toward.

I don't know if the member understands that, but we are fighting for fairness here, to make sure that we level the playing field and to make sure that we safeguard those hard-working construction workers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I don't know if the minister understands this. My question was, "Are you going to release the impact cost analysis that should have been done before you introduced Bill 119?" Bolton Electric, in Dufferin-Caledon, has done that impact cost analysis, and in their case they are looking at a \$4,600 increase in their WSIB premiums. Bolton Electric has 12 employees, and they've been doing all of the right things to protect those employees. The time and money Bolton Electric invests yearly in staff safety has proven that their proactive approach has reduced lost-time accidents substantially. By forcing them to insure under WSIB, you are directly affecting their competitiveness.

Minister, I ask again, are you prepared to direct your ministry to prepare and release the impact cost analysis so that you can understand how this change affects small business in Ontario?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I'm glad that the company mentioned is investing in their employees and in health and safety. This is what this is all about: making sure that companies do bring those safeguards to their employees and making sure that we level the playing field. For too long, there have been organizations, businesses out there, misclassifying their workers and putting their workers in precarious situations. I've spoken to one of the cases in the letters that I got where there was a fatality of a construction worker and he was not insured, and what happened to that family—where they did not get any benefits. We want to make sure that those families do get benefits. We want to make sure that those workers, if

they do get injured with that company and all construction companies in Ontario, are insured and that we safeguard those employees.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Yesterday, we heard from the lawyer for a Scarborough man found not criminally responsible for killing his family because he suffered from schizophrenia. It's believed this tragedy could have been prevented if Ontario had better mental health care programs available in the community. Why does the minister continue to treat community mental health as the poor cousin of health care?

Hon. David Caplan: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Thank you for the question. I really don't know what the adequacy of the mental health provisions are, but I know that, in this particular instance, the member opposite had asked for an inquest. I would suggest to both parties that they would certainly look to advise the family of the opportunities open to them to deal with the local coroner and ask that local coroner to make a decision. Then, if they're not satisfied, I would encourage the members to advise the individuals concerned that they could appeal to the regional coroner and have him or her make that decision, and if they're not satisfied with that, then obviously they can appeal to the chief coroner.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I know I said it in French, but usually he understands.

I want to know why we continue to treat mental health as a poor cousin. Here's what the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario, which is with us today, has to say: "The number of people with mental disorders in the justice system is increasing at the rate of about 10% a year." According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario spends less per capita than any other province, and despite increases over the last four years, mental health spending has declined and represents only 3% of the health care spending of this province.

I ask again, to the Minister of Health, when will this minister truly support community mental health programs so that terrible tragedies like those experienced by the Chau family can be averted in the future?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. David Caplan: I think it's important to put this in a little bit of context. New Democrats, when in power, cut mental health funding by \$23 million in 1992. They cut mental health funding again in 1994 and 1995 by an additional \$42 million. The Conservative Party had no base increase for community mental health services in eight years.

I want to contrast that with this side of the House. We've had \$270 million in new funding that has expanded services to over 200,000 Ontarians and hired

1,100 new mental health workers. So if there is a comparison between the commitments for mental health between the various parties and the actions that have been taken, I am happy to compare the record of this party and this government to the New Democrats and to the Conservatives any day of the week and twice on Sunday.

ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is for the Minister of Culture. After a year of renovations, the Art Gallery of Ontario reopened its doors to the public this past weekend. Admission was free for the weekend. The reopening was covered extensively by the media, including the foreign media, most particularly a really rave review by the New York Times.

I have to say the new AGO is stunning. More than 3,500 donors and various levels of government contributed to the renewal of this cultural icon and, truly, the newly transformed AGO does not disappoint.

Minister, what was Ontario's role in the renewal of this cultural icon?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I'm delighted to respond to my honourable colleague. Last Friday, I was fortunate indeed to participate at the reopening of the Ontario art gallery. Frank Gehry's magnificent architectural treasure will engage, captivate and inspire Ontarians and tourists for generations to come. It is a jewel that links the historic buildings, the marvellous modern addition, the streetscape and the neighbourhood where Gehry grew up.

The wisdom of this government is mind-boggling in investing \$39 million in the Ontario art gallery's restoration and reconstruction. May I say that our international reputation has gone right off the charts. It will bring countless international visitors to this city, celebrating the renaissance that is Toronto and that is the hub to this wonderful province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The clock was below zero.

DEFERRED VOTES

BUDGET MEASURES AND INTERIM APPROPRIATION ACT, 2008 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES ET L'AFFECTATION ANTICIPÉE DE CRÉDITS (NO 2)

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 114, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters, to amend the Ottawa Congress Centre Act and to enact the Ontario Capital Growth Corporation Act, 2008 / Projet de loi 114, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation

anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions, modifiant la Loi sur le Centre des congrès d'Ottawa et édictant la Loi de 2008 sur la Société ontarienne de financement de la croissance.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1133 to 1143.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol
Albanese, Laura	Duguid, Brad	Moridi, Reza
Arthurs, Wayne	Duncan, Dwight	Naqvi, Yasir
Balkissoon, Bas	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Oraziotti, David
Bartolucci, Rick	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Bentley, Christopher	Gravelle, Michael	Qaadri, Shafiq
Best, Margaret	Hoy, Pat	Ramal, Khalil
Bradley, James J.	Jaczek, Helena	Ramsay, David
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Ruprecht, Tony
Brown, Michael A.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Levac, Dave	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	Mangat, Amrit	Smitherman, George
Carroll, Aileen	Matthews, Deborah	Sousa, Charles
Chan, Michael	Mauro, Bill	Takhar, Harinder S.
Colle, Mike	McGuinty, Dalton	Watson, Jim
Craitor, Kim	McMeekin, Ted	Wilkinson, John
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Zimmer, David
Dickson, Joe	Milloy, John	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
Bailey, Robert	MacLeod, Lisa	Runciman, Robert W.
Barrett, Toby	Marchese, Rosario	Savoline, Joyce
Bisson, Gilles	Martiniuk, Gerry	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	Miller, Norm	Shurman, Peter
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Paul	Sterling, Norman W.
Gélinas, France	Munro, Julia	Tabuns, Peter
Horwath, Andrea	Murdoch, Bill	Wilson, Jim
Hudak, Tim	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Jones, Sylvia	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakubuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 59; the nays are 30.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1146 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SMALL BUSINESS

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise today on behalf of my constituents whose voices this government have ignored, and whose businesses are in jeopardy if and when Bill 119 becomes law.

The McGuinty government's WSIB legislation is a slap in the face to construction industry owners who are

already looking after the health and safety of their employees. It is an insult to insinuate that the small and medium-sized firms are not safeguarding the well-being of their employees. Their employees are an investment in their company, and they're doing just that.

Thanks to the regressive apprenticeship policies of this McGuinty government, they need to keep their skilled tradespeople healthy and happy, and they do.

The construction companies are asking you, Premier, to back out. They are already struggling to keep their heads above water between your excessive corporate taxes and health taxes.

Premier, you have hidden your head in the sand for too long instead of dealing with our sagging economic situation. Now we are in a recession and our small businesses will be exceptionally hard hit. With all that going on, you pick this time, Mr. Premier, to kick these businesses while they're down.

I'm sure there's no correlation between the unions that pushed you to bring Bill 119 forward and the Liberal fundraisers being held in union halls, but perception is reality. So then why now, and why are you in such a hurry?

CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Today I rise in the House on World Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease Day—COPD.

Today at 4 p.m. on the legislative grounds, the Ontario Lung Association will be joining patients who suffer from COPD. These patients have walked, cycled, jogged and rowed thousands of kilometres to reach Queen's Park in celebrating COPD Day. They come from every riding to connect with MPPs, to tell us how important it is for the government to support the Ontario lung health framework that supports COPD programs and services across the province.

COPD is a term referring to two lung diseases: chronic bronchitis and emphysema. COPD is the fourth leading cause of death in Canada, expected to be the third in about 10 years. About 500,000 Ontarians have COPD, and there is no cure. We know, though, that pulmonary rehabilitation works.

Even though the lung association does incredible work, awareness about COPD still remains low. The celebration today brings to the forefront the importance of understanding this chronic disease, the need for greater diagnosis, education and management as well as the benefit of pulmonary rehabilitation. I encourage members to make their way to the front of the Legislature to welcome these sufferers and to listen to their stories.

SAUGEEN TERRITORY AWARDS OF RECOGNITION AND SUCCESS

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Today I would like to congratulate my constituents who were winners at the 2008 Saugeen Territory Awards of Recognition and Success.

The STARS awards were held on October 29 in Arthur, and were presented by the Saugeen Economic Development Corp. and Industry Canada, in conjunction with local chambers of commerce and business associations.

The Falls Inn, owned by Meg and Dwayne Hallman of Walters Falls, was the winner of the Entrepreneur of the Year Award and Company of the Year Award with over 15 employees. The Entrepreneur of the Year Award was awarded because they have shown initiative and innovation in business with the introduction of their new service to the community. The Company of the Year Award was received for company growth, employee relations, safety workplace and environmental awareness.

Sean McGivern of Desboro, owner of Grassroots Organics, was winner of the Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award. McGivern's company grows and mills organic grain on the property. The grain is used to produce flour, cereal and pasta and is sold locally.

Sidekicks Café in Markdale, owned by John Daley, was the winner of the Corporate Citizens of the Year Award. Daley and his café were given this award because of their outstanding charity work in the community.

Top O' the Rock in Eugenia, owned by Debbie Clark, was winner of the Company of the Year Award for under 15 employees. The Top O' the Rock experienced a fire, forcing the company to rebuild. They have demonstrated growth, good employee relations and safety in the workplace.

Markdale Foodland, owned by Doug Crawford, was awarded the customer service excellence award. This award is given to the business that provides consistent exceptional customer service.

Again, I would like to congratulate my constituents for winning these awards and for providing my riding with excellent products and services.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Toby Barrett: More evidence of the outrage felt by businesses across Ontario at this government's blind rush to ram their WSIB bill through to appease their cronies—many of the voices from ridings with McGuinty representatives falling on deaf ears.

In the riding of Brant, four companies wrote to me—a roofing company, a homebuilder firm, a manufacturing and a contracting business—asking for their representative to listen to sense and vote against this legislation. I know there is a lady here today from Paris in the members' gallery.

In Elgin—Middlesex—London, there's a construction firm attempting to relate their concerns of the dire impact this may have on business at a time when this government has already deep-sixed the economy. A London plumbing firm has indicated, "It will increase underground business in an industry where such activity is already pervasive."

My colleague from Oxford has related concerns from his riding. A metal fabricating facility calls this "just a tax grab when we can least afford it." An Oxford area

electrician states, "It seems that Labour Minister Fonseca is only trying to drive out the small companies. All he seems to care about is the construction unions and their big business buddies."

Of course, in my riding of Haldimand-Norfolk, there is no end of businesses concerned. I get e-mails from construction companies, greenhouses, contractors and machine manufacturers.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I rise in the House today to stand up against bullying.

This week is Bullying Awareness Week in Canada, an opportunity to raise awareness about a very serious issue. Whether it happens in person or through technologies like cellphones or the Internet, it can have a lasting impact on the individuals involved.

Yesterday, in my great riding of London-Fanshawe, over 11,000 students and staff at Thames Valley District School Board participated in a Sea of Pink campaign. Students and staff wore pink T-shirts bearing the words "Be a someone" and "Take a stand."

Throughout the week, schools in Thames Valley will be addressing the problem of bullying through media campaigns, classroom activities, workshops and other special events.

I am so proud of the leadership these students and staff have shown. If we want our schools to be welcoming places where everyone feels safe, comfortable and respected, we all have a role to play. Helping to raise awareness about this issue is one important step towards preventing it, and I encourage everyone to do their part and stand up against bullying.

I want to also wish the Thames Valley board and all the students who participated in this event good luck, and I know they are going to be successful because they are doing it because they care about others. It's important for all of us in this House to remember this week and, hopefully, in our way, participate in this event.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. John O'Toole: I rise on behalf of the small business persons in the riding of Durham who have objected to the added fees—you might say taxes—by this government imposed through the WSIB bill, Bill 119. In fact, they're calling it a tax grab, which is an additional cost of around \$11,000 for a typical small business in tough economic times. Rather than enhancing workplace safety, this legislation is more likely to drive business into the underground economy.

Previous Ministers of Labour have agreed with organizations such as the Ontario Home Builders' Association that has said that forcing mandatory coverage would be burdensome to small business.

The builders, contractors and many other small businesses in my riding have suggested a "named insured" program would be of greater benefit to all concerned, and I would urge the minister, who is here, to listen to the

advice introduced by my constituents. They wrote to him directly, and some I know personally as highly responsible and respected members of our community: Mario Veltri, for instance, from Marianna Developments, a long-time builder in the region of Durham; Peter Saturno, who was the head of the home builders of Ontario, from Midhaven Homes; David Veenstra, from Veenstra Design and Fine Home Building. All of these are respected small businesses employing real people, real families in the province of Ontario. They see this as a step backwards—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

1510

LEGISLATIVE INTERNS

Mr. Michael Prue: A lot of concern has been raised about the decreasing voter turnout amongst Canadian youth. The view is that young people today are not so interested in the political process. The question invariably comes to us as elected members: What can we do to ensure that the next generation of public leaders can continue the work of building a stronger and more just society?

I'd like to take this opportunity to shine some light on a group of young Ontarians who have broken this trend and have taken it upon themselves to become educated on the work of serving the public interest. Each year, the Ontario Legislature internship program chooses 10 of the brightest university graduates from across Canada and gives them the opportunity to learn, on the inside, how Ontario is governed on a day-to-day basis.

The 10 interns—Chelsea, Meghan, David, Kim, Tejas, Rosanne, Emma, Igor, Angela and Waqas—are hosting a reception here at Queen's Park this afternoon and into tonight to thank all the members and staff for their ongoing support of the program. It has been running successfully now for some 35 years and counts amongst its graduates members of Parliament, members of provincial Parliament, political staff, senior public servants and other public advocates. These interns work long hours for a modest stipend. We hope that all members will show up tonight, all staff hearing this, all people who can get into the Legislative Building. Come and congratulate these remarkable young people.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Mr. David Orazietti: I'm pleased today to comment on our government's initiative to help young people prepare for the future by investing in career-related work placements in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie.

This past week, our government made new investments of nearly \$4.3 million for internship and co-op work placements, including 34 in my community of Sault Ste. Marie. Employers in the Soo are receiving a total of \$663,000 for this program. The program provides a wage subsidy to help employers invest in the training of young people. Some of the local employers offering youth internships include organizations such as KPMG, the

Rotary Club of Sault Ste. Marie, the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre, St. Marys Paper, Sault College, the Group Health Centre, the Art Gallery of Algoma and the children's aid society. Since we launched the program in 2005, the province has provided more than \$21 million for over 1,000 placements.

It is of vital importance that northern Ontario is able to attract and retain highly skilled young people, and we recognize the value of programs like this in helping to achieve this goal. This investment will encourage Sault Ste. Marie's youth to explore future opportunities in the north, while providing a boost to our local economy. It is also part of our government's strategy to help Ontario's youth gain the skills and expertise they need to ensure that our province has the type of workforce necessary to be successful in the new economy.

I'd like to wish all those youth in my community of Sault Ste. Marie the best of luck on their placement.

YORKTOWN FAMILY SERVICES

Mrs. Laura Albanese: November is Woman Abuse Prevention Month, as the minister responsible for women's issues acknowledged in the House earlier this month. I want to speak today about a great non-profit organization which serves women and children living in Toronto, including my community of York South-Weston. Yorktown Family Services is a vital community resource for thousands of children, youth, women and families, and it is the only agency in Ontario that operates a children's mental health centre and a shelter for women and children. This allows the organization to offer a safe and stable environment for women and children who require assistance or need to remove themselves from an abusive relationship. I have witnessed firsthand how the organization is helping women who are vulnerable and who, at times, may not have the capacity to help themselves.

Recently, the organization launched its facilitator's guide for delivering culturally responsive parenting programs. Funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the guide emphasizes culturally sensitive services and is based on Yorktown's experience in delivering successful programs for the Somali community. By linking residents with resources and organizations available in the community, Yorktown is working hard to build programs that reflect the needs of the diverse individuals it assists.

HATE CRIMES

Mr. Mike Colle: I'm honoured today to rise in recognition of the Community Alliance Forum, a conference organized by the League for Human Rights of B'nai Brith Canada, which took place in Willowdale on November 3 and 4. My colleague David Zimmer, parliamentary assistant to the Attorney General, delivered opening remarks at this innovative conference, which was partially funded through a grant from the Ministry of the Attorney General.

I would like to take this opportunity to applaud B'nai Brith for organizing the Building Partnerships to Counter Hate conference. I'd also like to acknowledge the community, ethnic and religious groups which participated.

The conference brought together community stakeholders, educators, the justice sector and victim services providers, and in doing so, has helped establish links to better address hate crimes in diverse communities across the province. Such an initiative not only raises awareness but also empowers communities to establish strategies to combat intolerance and prevent the reoccurrence of hate crimes.

I would like to congratulate all those involved for their dedication to this issue, and for the holistic approach that has been taken to address hate crimes and intolerance across the province.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Michael Prue: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill Pr12, An Act to revive Porcupine Goldtop Mines Limited and to change its name to Porcupine Goldor Mines Limited.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CHRISTOPHER'S STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT (SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY AND ELECTRONIC SEXUAL MATERIAL), 2008 LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI A TRAIT À LA LOI CHRISTOPHER (REGISTRE DES DÉLINQUANTS SEXUELS ET DOCUMENTS À CARACTÈRE SEXUEL SOUS FORME ÉLECTRONIQUE)

Mr. Martiniuk moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 128, An Act to protect our children from sexual predators and exposure to electronic forms of sexual

material by amending Christopher's Law (Sex Offender Registry), 2000 and other Acts / *Projet de loi 128, Loi visant à protéger nos enfants contre les prédateurs sexuels et contre l'exposition à des documents à caractère sexuel diffusés sous forme électronique en modifiant la Loi Christopher de 2000 sur le registre des délinquants sexuels et d'autres lois.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I am very pleased to introduce a bill that would require Internet filtering software to be used on computers in libraries and public schools in the province of Ontario. This bill also calls for the province of Ontario to allow public access to the sex offender registry. The intent of this bill is to protect children from sexual offenders and exposure to pornographic material on the Internet.

My former bill, calling for the sex offender registry to be accessible to the public, passed second reading in 2006. Today, I have amended that bill to include the requirement that all public schools and libraries in Ontario install Internet filtering software to avoid the screening of harmful material.

Although some school and library boards use filters on computers, it is not required by law. This issue came to my attention recently when a retired police officer, Rob Nickel, spotted a library patron printing pornographic material.

I ask all of you in the Legislature to support my private member's bill and give our children this extra measure of protection.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
AMENDMENT ACT
(STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS FOR HEALTH CARE
AND EDUCATION), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
(COMITÉ PERMANENT
DES COMPTES PUBLICS
SUR LES SOINS DE SANTÉ
ET L'ÉDUCATION)

Mr. Ouellette moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 129, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act to establish the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for Health Care and Education / *Projet de loi 129, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative pour créer le Comité permanent des comptes publics sur les soins de santé et l'éducation.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Being that the ministries responsible for health care and education utilize in excess of 62% of the provincial budget, this bill establishes a new committee whose sole focus is working with the Auditor General directly in completely reviewing the ministries' operational and financial aspects pertaining to health care and education in the province of Ontario.

1520

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE
FOR ROAD CRASH VICTIMS

Hon. James J. Bradley: I rise in the House today to mark the first annual National Day of Remembrance for Road Crash Victims, and it's my understanding that in the House of Commons today, Minister Baird rose on the same issue, as the minister responsible for transportation nationally.

In our country of Canada, today has been designated as our nation's day to remember those we've lost in traffic collisions, to honour their lives, mourn their deaths and acknowledge our responsibility to prevent future injuries and deaths on our roads.

An international day of remembrance for road crash victims is observed in many countries as part of the United Nations Road Safety Collaboration. It is important that we speak out against the human devastation caused by carelessness, recklessness and impaired judgment on our roads.

Impaired driving remains the leading criminal cause of death in our country of Canada. About one quarter of all traffic fatalities in our province are alcohol-related. Families, friends and communities are devastated when the actions of an impaired driver take one of their own.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving has taken a leadership role in Canada's inaugural national day of remembrance, which focuses on victims of impaired driving. Margaret Miller, the president of MADD, has pointed out that this kind of nationwide recognition is significant. She said the following: "This day helps family and friends who lost loved ones with their grieving process and it helps us, as a society, focus on solutions to reduce the loss of life on our roads."

I wish to share with the Legislature a few steps that the McGuinty government has taken to deal with impaired drivers.

Ontario has some of the toughest drinking and driving laws in all of North America. Drunk drivers face stiff fines, licence suspensions, mandatory alcohol education or treatment, and an ignition interlock program.

Yesterday in the House, I announced the latest steps in our efforts to reduce drunk driving collisions. As many of you here today already know, young drivers aged 19 to

21 are overrepresented in drinking and driving collisions. Our government wants to put a stop to this by making it illegal for any person aged 21 or younger to drive after drinking any amount of alcohol. That means having a zero blood alcohol concentration whenever they are behind a wheel. It is part of a package of reforms introduced yesterday that is aimed at giving young and novice drivers the skills they need to enjoy a lifetime of safe driving.

To help police get drunk drivers off our roads, the bill would also allow police to immediately impound—for seven days—vehicles being driven by impaired drivers, and drivers who do not have a ignition interlock installed when required.

We will soon be putting in place new sanctions for drivers with a blood alcohol concentration from 0.05 to 0.08—what is referred to as the “warn range.”

People need to understand that driving with a blood alcohol concentration in the warn range, while not a Criminal Code offence, still poses an unacceptable risk to their safety and the safety of other road users.

As well, new measures are already in place to seize and forfeit the vehicles belonging to repeat drunk drivers.

My ministry continues to work closely with the police and other road safety partners in communities across the province to raise awareness about the dangers of drinking and driving. These measures are working. Our latest statistics show that Ontario has the lowest impaired driving offence rates in Canada, 39% lower than the national average. This is part of a long-term trend that has seen drinking and driving fatalities drop by more than 60% in our province since 1988. This is a good indication that, together, our hard work and dedication is saving lives.

Together we are driving home the simple truth that the basics of good driving skills can prevent traffic injuries and deaths. Together we are reaching out to Ontario drivers with a single resounding message: Drunk drivers have no place on our roads. That is a message that is true not only today, this National Day of Remembrance for Road Crash Victims, but every day, all year long.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Statements by ministries? Responses?

NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE FOR ROAD CRASH VICTIMS

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to respond on behalf of our leader, John Tory, and our critic, Frank Klees, as well as the PC caucus. We also thank Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Transport Canada, the Ontario Provincial Police and the many organizations that are to be commended for promoting this initiative.

Personally, I would like to begin with a remembrance tribute to a promising young hockey star who died in a single-vehicle crash this past summer. It was a sad day for Sonia and Karl Ramolla. On June 28, 2008, their son, K.J. Ramolla, was killed in a tragic single-vehicle rollover off Highway 400, near Gibson Lake Road in the

Muskokas. There was no alcohol or speed involved. It was just two young boys on the way home from the cottage for a home-cooked supper.

K.J. is the nephew of our senior House adviser, Julie Kwiecinski. K.J. was a promising young hockey star who had been represented by Bobby Orr for over five years. He had been drafted by the Kingston Frontenacs to the Ontario Hockey League and the Indiana Ice of the United States Hockey League. He was actively scouted for a hockey scholarship at Princeton and had just needed to top up his SAT scores to be admitted to Princeton. He was set to play in the New England Pro Am Hockey League's elite Chowder Cup tournament this past summer, just before he was killed. K.J. played his last two hockey seasons as a forward and assistant captain with the Newmarket Hurricanes Jr. A Hockey Club, where he was voted by the players and fans as the most popular young player in both years he played.

K.J. was loved by all during his short time with us. K.J. was known for helping those who cannot help themselves and making others smile and shine. K.J. played hockey in the same manner as he conducted himself in life. He shared the puck, and worked just as hard at making others look good on the ice as he did on his own time on the ice.

K.J.'s last hockey number, 19, will be retired at a special benefit hockey game at the Ray Twinney complex in Newmarket on Saturday, December 27, 2008, beginning at 7:30 p.m. It will be a memorial game for K.J. and Josh Sedore, the young son of the Newmarket Hurricanes' assistant coach, who passed away on the same weekend as K.J. Proceeds for this game will be split between two: the K.J. Ramolla Memorial Fund, administered by the York Region Community Foundation, and the Southlake hospital cancer centre.

The Newmarket Hurricanes will take on the Couchiching Terriers, K.J.'s former OHA team. Anyone who ever played with K.J. on either of these teams will be eligible to play in this charity event.

This is just one story of the devastating loss of a young hockey star in the prime of his life. It reminds us of the real cost and consequences of road crashes, the purpose of this remembrance day. It is a call for all Ontarians to adopt safer driving habits and to increase their knowledge and awareness of their responsibilities. We mourn these young people and indeed all those whose lives have been cut short through needless traffic fatalities, and we express our support for the injured. We show our sympathy and our support for all those whose lives have been tragically changed forever by car crashes.

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With the tabling, as the minister said, of Bill 126 yesterday, we are also reminded of the deaths of three young Toronto men—Tyler Mulcahy, Cory Mintz and Kourosh Totonchian—in a Muskoka car crash last July, another needless tragedy.

I'd like to briefly mention some of the victims whose lives have been affected in the riding of Durham. Lisa, the 24-year-old daughter of Uxbridge Councillor Bev

Northeast, and her husband were both killed by a drunk driver in a crash that left their three-year-old son Mathew an orphan. Mathew, now 19, was raised by his grandmother, Councillor Northeast.

The impact on lives is visited, I'm sure, in each riding across Ontario. It's an important time to remember and take the necessary action like Bill 126 and indeed Bill 118—anything we can do to make our roads safer.

In 2006, 199,690 people were injured on Canadian roads. Of those, 2,892 died, while 15,281 were seriously injured. The social costs are unimaginable and the real-life cost and the needless waste is something we should all be reminded of and take whatever action we can to make our roads safer.

JOURNÉE NATIONALE DU SOUVENIR DES VICTIMES DE LA ROUTE

M. Gilles Bisson: Aujourd'hui marque la première commémoration annuelle de la Journée nationale du souvenir des victimes de la route. On doit dire ici à l'Assemblée que nous, comme législateurs et aussi comme membres de familles, on comprend très bien notre responsabilité et ce que nos actions doivent être à travers cette législature pour s'assurer que nos routes et que les lois qui gouvernent ces routes soient les meilleures au Canada pour être capables de sauvegarder les individus sur nos routes.

Mais c'est le temps aussi de réfléchir un peu sur la perte de ces personnes. Les victimes d'accidents mortels sur les routes à travers cette province et ce pays, c'est une tragédie que je pense que nous pouvons tous comprendre. Pour la plupart de nous autres, cela nous est arrivé dans nos familles, dans nos voisinages ou avec nos amis. On comprend très bien, quand il y a une telle perte, que c'est tragique non seulement pour la famille et certainement pour ceux qui sont proches à cette personne, mais aussi pour notre communauté.

On doit tous dans cette province, législateurs, police et autres, faire ce qu'on peut pour s'assurer qu'on a des routes qui sont les meilleures dans le monde, que nos lois sont parmi les meilleures, et aussi qu'on a un système policier, à la fin de la journée, qui peut facilement et avec efficacité assister pour assurer que les lois sont suivies.

Mais il y a une responsabilité individuelle là-dedans. C'est important, je pense, qu'on reconnaisse que nous, comme conducteurs et comme membres de familles et de cette société, devons prendre nos responsabilités et ne pas accepter que tout peut être légiféré. Il y a des fois que nous, comme personnes d'un voisinage, voyons quelqu'un qui fait quelque chose qui n'est pas sûr sur la route, et il faut que nous, comme citoyens, prenions notre responsabilité pour dire à ces individus, « Ce n'est pas acceptable. » Par exemple—cela nous arrive tous—on s'en va à un party de famille, on s'en va à une célébration quelque part : un peu de boisson, un verre de vin, deux verres de bière. Éventuellement, la personne dit, « Je vais embarquer dans mon auto » ou dans son camion pour aller à la maison. On a la responsabilité comme

citoyen de dire, « Écoute. Il faut se sauvegarder, et moi, comme citoyen, je prends ma responsabilité. » Il ne faut pas seulement dire, « La police va te poigner » ou que c'est la législation dans la province qui va trouver une solution. Nous, on a besoin de prendre la responsabilité.

Quand ça vient aux jeunes et aux moins jeunes qui utilisent leur automobile, eux-autres aussi ont besoin de prendre la responsabilité. J'ai dit justement dans cette Assemblée il y a quelques jours que conduire, ce n'est pas un droit mais un privilège. On doit accepter qu'avec ce privilège de conduire nos automobiles nous avons, comme citoyens, une responsabilité de nous assurer, premièrement, que notre voiture est en bonne ordre, deuxièmement, qu'on est bien entraîné pour conduire de manière sûre et que, plus important, on prend notre responsabilité de manière sérieuse : qu'on n'utilise pas un téléphone cellulaire quand on conduit une automobile, qu'on fait attention à l'environnement autour de nous pour nous assurer qu'on conduit d'une manière qui est sûre non seulement pour nous mais, plus important, pour les autres qui sont sur la route.

Le point que je veux faire est que oui, c'est la journée de se rappeler ceux qu'on a perdus dans notre société et d'accepter que c'est une tragédie. Oui, comme législateurs, on a une responsabilité de s'assurer qu'on a de bonnes lois dans cette province. Mais finalement, vous comprenez aussi bien que moi que c'est notre responsabilité comme individus et que nous, comme individus dans cette société, devons faire tout ce qu'on peut pour s'assurer que le monde prenne leur responsabilité et que, comme citoyens, on comprenne que conduire une automobile n'est pas un droit mais un privilège et que l'on a besoin de le respecter.

PETITIONS

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a number of petitions, brought down by Muskoka Builders' Association members who are still here are in the gallery, to do with Bill 119. It reads:

"Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 119, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008, which makes the WSIB mandatory for independent operators, partners and executive officers in construction; and

"Whereas this bill will cost the average business owner about \$11,000 while doing nothing to catch cheaters in the underground economy; and

"Whereas this bill will do nothing to make workers safer in the workplace; and

"Whereas there has been insufficient consultation with construction companies and stakeholders to discuss the impact of this bill or other alternatives; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government refuses to allow discussion of this bill with the affected parties through the committee process;

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To revoke Bill 119 or to require the Standing Committee on Social Policy to travel across the province of Ontario in order to provide an opportunity for consultation with the affected businesses."

I support this petition and affix my signature to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition sent to me by Karen Webster of Manor Road in Oakville. It is addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It deals with the proposal to build a western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre and it reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I am pleased to sign and support this petition, and to ask page Sahara to carry it for me.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank my colleague Mr. Miller and Lakewood Construction of Port Carling for sending this petition to me.

"Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 119, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008, which makes the WSIB mandatory for independent operators, partners and executive officers in construction; and

"Whereas this bill will cost the average business owner about \$11,000 while doing nothing to catch cheaters in the underground economy; and

"Whereas this bill will do nothing to make workers safer in the workplace; and

"Whereas there has been insufficient consultation with construction companies and stakeholders to discuss the impact of this bill or other alternatives; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government refuses to allow discussion of this bill with the affected parties through the committee process;

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To revoke Bill 119 or to require the Standing Committee on Social Policy to travel across the province of Ontario in order to provide an opportunity for consultation with the affected businesses."

I agree with this petition and have signed it.

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PROTECTION FOR MINERS

M^{me} France Gélinais: I have a petition from the people of Deep River and Chalk River.

"Whereas the current legislation contained in the Ontario health and safety act and regulations for mines and mining plants does not adequately protect the lives of miners, we request revisions to the act;

"Lyle Everett Defoe and the scoop tram he was operating fell 150 feet down an open stope (July 23, 2007). Lyle was 25 years and 15 days old when he was killed at Xstrata Kidd Creek mine site, Timmins.

"Section R-60 (page 60 of Mining Regulations), paragraph 74 states that, 'A shaft, raise or other opening in an underground mine shall be securely fenced, covered or otherwise guarded. RRO 1990, Reg. 854s 75(1).' The stope where Lyle was killed was protected by a length of orange plastic snow fence and a rope with a warning sign. These barriers would not have been visible if the bucket of the scoop tram was raised. Lyle's body was recovered from behind the scoop tram.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Concrete berms must be mandatory to protect all open stopes and raises;

"All miners and contractors working underground must have working communication devices and personal locators;

"All equipment involved in injuries and fatalities must be recovered and examined unless such recovery would endanger the lives of others; and

"The entire act must be reviewed and amended to better protect underground workers."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the clerk's table with Luis.

HOSPICES

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas hospices on church or hospital property do not pay taxes;

"Whereas hospices are not-for-profit organizations providing emotional, spiritual and bereavement support and respite care to terminally ill individuals and their family members;

"Whereas a residential hospice (usually an eight-to-10 bed home-like facility) provides around-the-clock care to terminally ill individuals and support to their families;

"Whereas hospice services are provided free of charge;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow hospices across the province to be exempt from municipal taxes."

I affix my signature and give it to the page.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition—it actually could be called the Bob Bailey petition, but I'll leave it for others to decide. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 119, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008, which makes the WSIB mandatory for independent operators, partners and executive officers in construction; and

"Whereas this bill will cost the average business owner about \$11,000 while doing nothing to catch cheaters in the underground economy; and

"Whereas this bill will do nothing to make workers safer in the workplace; and

"Whereas there has been insufficient consultation with construction companies and stakeholders to discuss the impact of this bill or other alternatives; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government refuses to allow discussion of this bill with the affected parties through the committee process;

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To revoke Bill 119 or to require the Standing Committee on Social Policy to travel across the province of Ontario in order to provide an opportunity for consultation with the affected businesses."

I am pleased to sign and support this, and give it to one of the new pages.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: I present this petition:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has launched a blatant attack on our province's grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren by cutting off access to the temporary care assistance program;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislature call on the minister to overturn her July 2008 directives outlining the temporary care assistance program and grant all grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren access to this much-needed financial support."

I agree with the petition and affix my name to it, and Kush will bring it down.

PROFESSIONAL HOCKEY FRANCHISE

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a petition that reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment has the highest average ticket revenue per game in the National Hockey League; and

"Whereas the Toronto Maple Leafs are ranked the most financially valuable team in the NHL; and

"Whereas many Hamilton and greater Toronto area hockey fans are unable to attend professional hockey games due to a lack of adequate ticket supply; and

"Whereas the Hamilton and greater Toronto area boast the biggest and the best market in the world for hockey fans, with Maple Leafs Sports and Entertainment bringing approximately \$2.4 billion to the local economy over 10 years; and

"Whereas a new franchise in the Hamilton and greater Toronto area is valued at \$600 million by some economists; and

"Whereas competition in both business and sports is healthy for both the Hamilton and greater Toronto area economy and sports team performance; and

"Whereas despite having the most loyal fans in the world, the Toronto Maple Leafs have not won the Stanley Cup in over 40 years; and

"Whereas Hamilton and greater Toronto area fans deserve competitive professional hockey teams;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To request that the government of Ontario express its strong support to the board of governors of the National Hockey League for the relocation or expansion of a second NHL hockey team in the Hamilton and greater Toronto area in order to realize the economic advantages to the taxpayers of the province of Ontario and to provide healthy competition to the existing Toronto NHL franchise."

I agree with this.

EMANCIPATION DAY

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the British Parliament abolished slavery in the British Empire as of August 1, 1834, as a result of the work of abolitionists; and

"Whereas the Ontario Black History Society has for several years been advocating for the commemoration of August 1 as Emancipation Day; and

"Whereas there remain in Ontario clear and visible signs of the province's early Black presence; and

"Whereas the freedom offered by emancipation day facilitated a Black presence throughout the province and fully sparked the northward movement of enslaved Africans from the United States into Canada on the Underground Railroad; and

"Whereas Bill 111, An Act to Proclaim Emancipation Day, is the first bill in Ontario history to be co-sponsored by two MPPs of different political parties, Ted Arnott and Maria Van Bommel;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support Bill 111 and recognize August 1 formally as Emancipation Day."

I'm pleased to say that this petition is signed by a former Speaker of the Legislature, Alvin Curling, and I, of course, have affixed my signature as well.

SECURITY LICENCE FEES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from the people of my riding, and they draw attention to the following:

"Exorbitant annual costs of the new security licence of \$80 per year are imposed on some of the poorest-paid Ontario workers.

"We understand the need for regulation of the security seal through Bill 159.

"However, we request that fees be adjusted to a more reasonable rate, perhaps more along the lines of Ontario driver permit fees of \$75, that would be renewed every five years.

"Security guards are among the lowest-paid workers in Ontario, and in most cases, the cost is absorbed entirely by the worker."

I will affix my name to it and send it with the page.

HOSPICES

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today from citizens in Georgetown, Brampton, Mississauga and Toronto.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas hospices on church or hospital property do not pay taxes;

"Whereas hospices are not-for-profit organizations providing emotional, spiritual and bereavement support and respite care to terminally ill individuals and their family members;

"Whereas a residential hospice (usually an eight-to-10 bed home-like facility) provides around-the-clock care to terminally ill individuals and support to their families;

"Whereas hospice services are provided free of charge;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow hospices across the province to be exempt from municipal taxes."

I agree with this petition and will give it to page Kush.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is also regarding Bill 119.

"Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 119, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008, which makes the WSIB mandatory for independent operators, partners and executive officers in construction; and

"Whereas this bill will cost the average business owner about \$11,000 while doing nothing to catch cheaters in the underground economy; and

"Whereas this bill will do nothing to make workers safer in the workplace; and

"Whereas there has been insufficient consultation with construction companies and stakeholders to discuss the impact of this bill or other alternatives; and

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"Whereas the McGuinty government refuses to allow discussion of this bill with the affected parties through the committee process;

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To revoke Bill 119 or to require the Standing Committee on Social Policy to travel across the province of Ontario in order to provide an opportunity for consultation with affected businesses."

I support this petition and affix my signature to it.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have a petition here. I thought the time was going to run out.

"Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 119, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008, which makes the WSIB mandatory for independent operators, partners and executive officers in construction; and

"Whereas this bill will cost the average business owner about \$11,000 while doing nothing to catch cheaters in the underground economy; and

"Whereas this bill will do nothing to make workers safer in the workplace; and

"Whereas there has been insufficient consultation with construction companies and stakeholders to discuss the impact of this bill or other alternatives; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government refuses to allow discussion of this bill with the affected parties through the committee process;

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To revoke Bill 119 or to require the Standing Committee on Social Policy to travel across the province of Ontario in order to provide an opportunity for consultation with affected businesses."

I agree with this petition wholeheartedly and affix my name to it and pass it down with Jenna.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The time for petitions has expired.

OPPOSITION DAY

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I move that, whereas Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insur-

ance Act, 1997, will impose an oppressive \$11,000 new tax on small construction companies in Ontario; and

Whereas the notion that the bill will improve workplace safety is questionable, as it includes thousands of office workers who never set foot on a construction site; and

Whereas there are still serious and alarming concerns about the wisdom of the McGuinty Liberals imposing this additional tax burden on business, especially during a severe economic downturn in this province; and

Whereas the changes proposed under the bill will not come into effect until 2012, giving the McGuinty Liberals more than adequate time to allow a much more democratic process before they push the bill through using their majority;

The Legislature of Ontario calls on the McGuinty government to extend public hearings on the bill to communities across Ontario in early 2009 and allow all members to speak to the bill before it becomes law.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Runciman has moved opposition day number 5.

Mr. Runciman.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It brings me no pleasure to rise today and speak to this motion, but it is a matter of necessity. It's the duty of a loyal citizen of this province to stand up and speak out when he or she sees their government doing something so wrong, so dangerous, so counterproductive in this difficult economic climate. It's also a duty for that citizen to stand up for democracy and the principles that are supposed to guide all public officials, even those in a majority government. Today, both of those causes have prompted our party to issue this motion.

The last few weeks have seen what I think could accurately be described as shocking developments in our province. We've seen the McGuinty government take Ontario into deficit, creating higher taxes and a larger debt for future generations. And we've seen the McGuinty government, for the first time in Ontario's proud history, allow us to become a have-not province, accepting handouts from other governments. What we have not seen is any plan to turn things around, to bring Ontario back to its rightful place as Canada's economic engine. Worse than that, Mr. McGuinty's team has blatantly continued along the same failed path of increased taxation, regulation and bureaucracy, the same discredited policies that have weakened our economy and made us much more vulnerable to global problems.

We're here today to discuss just one example of this unthinking and unblinking attitude, what amounts to a tax hike on business, particularly small business. As unbelievable as it is, with our economy in tatters, tens of thousands of jobs lost, the McGuinty Liberals feel this is a fine time to increase the cost of doing business. Figure that one out, Speaker. This is a job-killing measure that was created without consulting the people who will be impacted, and it's being rammed through this Legislature with arrogant speed. It's another frustrating example of a government that pays lip service to the ideas of part-

nership and consultation, but then does just whatever it pleases. And worse still, it is the latest illustration of how this government does not understand or doesn't care how its policies are driving jobs out of Ontario.

Speaker, we want to share with you some of the facts of the issue, including the devastating impact the Liberal plan could have on small businesses, which are essentially our greatest job creators in this province.

What's being proposed by the McGuinty government sounds like a simple technical change. Their Bill 119 would amend the legislation governing the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. However, this legislation, if passed, will impose a major and expensive burden on Ontario businesses. It will force them to purchase workplace insurance through the WSIB, whether they want it or not, whether they can afford it or not and whether or not they already have insurance. This is imposing a significant new cost on doing business in Ontario, especially for smaller businesses in the construction trades. It's effectively a dramatic tax hike on small business.

Not only are the McGuinty Liberals introducing a new tax on small business, but they introduced it following Small Business Week, when they're supposed to be helping and celebrating small business, not slapping them in the face. Even more mind-boggling, they've introduced it during an economic slowdown, when Ontarians need every possible job, not a new tax that will further discourage growth and job creation.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has made it clear that this bill will impose an average \$11,000 a year in extra costs on small companies in the construction sector—\$11,000 more per year. Many of the small business owners who have talked to us about being affected by this were here today in the Legislature to express their anger and frustration. They told us, as they've told this government and its members, who are essentially ignoring them, that this bill does nothing to enhance worker safety. Requiring people who go nowhere near construction sites to obtain WSIB coverage has nothing to do with safety. It has everything to do with a revenue grab, and it has everything to do with satisfying certain friends of this government. As I outlined earlier today in question period, that's outrageous, and some—

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's payback time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): If you could just take your seat.

The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, I would like you to withdraw that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I was just doing my work here—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Withdraw what you said. I'm asking you to withdraw.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Runciman.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: For the sake of the viewers, I'll repeat that comment, Speaker. This legislation has everything to do with a revenue grab and everything

to do with satisfying certain friends of this government. As I outlined earlier today, that's the outrageous and, some might suggest, ethically challenged bottom line here. The evidence is clear. The people that this government chose to consult with are not representatives of the companies that will be affected. They are all connected directly to the Liberal Party or indirectly to it through a group known as Working Families. For those viewing who may not have heard of this organization, Working Families is a compilation of unions that spent millions of dollars in the past two provincial elections essentially in support of the Liberal Party of Ontario.

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In that vein, I'll remind you of the list of people this government invited to testify before the committee reviewing Bill 119. I mentioned some of them today; I'll go over it again. The Ontario Pipe Trades Council donated \$400,000 to Working Families. The Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council—a fellow by the name of Pat Dillon, the manager of that group, was a co-chair of Working Families. The same council's director of government relations doubled as the chief financial officer for Working Families. The Ontario Council of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades describe themselves as supporters of—

Interjections: Working Families.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: —Working Families. Finally, the Labourers' International Union of North America, coincidentally I'm sure, are hosting the Liberal Party's 2008 Holiday Trillium Dinner.

It's pretty obvious what's happening here and who is being pandered to. When you design a bill to satisfy one special interest group without any balance, you're going to end up with a lousy piece of legislation, and that's what is happening with Bill 119. The stench is pungent and very telling. Outside of the fact that it will cripple many employers at the worst possible time, when Ontario needs every job and every investor it can get; outside of the fact that this rotten idea is being falsely wrapped up in pretty paper and labelled as a safety issue—outside of those considerations—it is simply a badly designed bill.

First of all, the legislation forces owners of companies to join the WSIB insurance plan, which frankly is a ridiculous idea. It means that owners will get to decide if they're injured or not, and opens a potential flood of incorrect or false claims. It's also an unfair extra burden on business owners who already have insurance from private companies, but now the government will force those owners to pay for WSIB coverage as well as paying their own insurance premiums.

That takes me to a second point, which is that this bill robs businesses of freedom of choice and may rob people of better protection. Most private insurance offers coverage 24/7, 365 days a year, while the WSIB not only offers less coverage in many respects, but it's also more expensive. It's the worst of both possible worlds for business owners and their workers.

This clearly points out the third problem: that there was absolutely no consultation with Ontario's employers,

the people who would ultimately foot the bill. The Small Business Agency of Ontario looked at this legislation last year and said it was a bad idea. Then the government failed to consult the CFIB, which represents over 40,000 businesses in Ontario. Yet the Liberals did do—seem to have done—a fine job of consulting with their friends and financial supporters. Not surprisingly, this legislation seems to have been custom-made to fill their wish list.

The Liberals claim that this bill is needed to crack down on the underground economy, where workers may not have insurance coverage, and on fraudulent claims. If the government were serious about stamping out fraudulent claims, they would simply move to a named insurance system, so that they would know exactly who is covered and who is not.

In any circumstances, this would be lousy legislation. It takes away freedom of choice, it imposes new paperwork and regulations, and it treats people like business owners and office workers as though they are doing dangerous jobs atop a skyscraper. But today in Ontario, with businesses struggling to survive, imposing extra costs on them is simply inexcusable. The bottom line is that Ontario businesses and our economy cannot afford a significant new business tax today, when Ontario has already gone from first to worst in economic growth in this country, not when this government has dragged us down from being Canada's breadwinner, with money in the bank, to the equivalent of being in debt and on welfare.

The Premier famously said, just five months ago, that tough times like this were no time to impose a new tax on business. He was right then, and he's wrong now to allow this legislation to go forward.

If Ontario is going to fight its way back to the top, and it must do so for the sake of our families, our future, and the good of this nation, if we're going to restore Ontario's economic strength, this government must stop taking actions like this. It must stop imposing new regulations, new fees, new costs, new paperwork and other burdens.

The other alarming element of what's happening here, and you should be concerned, Speaker, and I'm sure you are, is this government's efforts to close down debate and limit public input on this bill. They've time-allocated House and committee debate and banned—banned—hearings outside of Toronto. What we're witnessing is the very dark side of majority government: public input on a bad special-interest-benefiting bill being drastically curtailed, with no rational explanation as to why. Of course, there is no rational or reasonable explanation for doing this. The deep thinkers in the Premier's office are trying to get this dirty piece of laundry out the door as quickly as possible, before too many people notice. And to date, with regrettably a compliant press gallery, they seem to be succeeding. Somebody has to say it.

If the government insists on ramming this through in an undemocratic way, it will send a clear message to every current and potential employer in Ontario that someone else is pulling the strings.

This is a time for Dalton McGuinty to decide where his loyalties lie and what his job really entails. If Mr. McGuinty understands that job one right now in Ontario is restoring our economic strength, not pandering to special interests at the expense of workers and employers, then he will instruct his members to support our motion. What we're asking for is very, very reasonable and fair: Extend public hearings, and allow all members of this House to speak before it becomes law. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I will be joined this afternoon by our WSIB critic, the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

This is a most interesting debate. I want to explain. I find myself almost congenitally incapable of voting with Liberals on any matter in this chamber, and when I find myself forced into a position that some might interpret as aligning with Liberals, I feel compelled to be even more specific about my position and the position of the NDP caucus.

Look, New Democrats oppose the time allocation motion that the Liberals imposed on this Parliament and on this process, and they brought this upon themselves. They brought a time allocation motion on a bill that they knew was contentious. I acknowledged when I spoke to Bill 119, as did the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, that this was a contentious issue. There were two sides to the matter. I don't agree with the Conservative position, but the Conservatives speak for a community that doesn't support this legislation. I understand that. I support this legislation. New Democrats believe that all workers should be participants in the WSIB, the workers' compensation system. As a matter of fact, you'll recall that we berated the government for, in the process of bringing along Bill 119, not including financial services workers. The Liberals obviously didn't have the stomach to take on the big banks and the insurance companies and any number of call centres because it tragically remains that, notwithstanding Bill 119, there's still going to be a huge chunk of workers in this province who are going to be denied WSIB workers' comp coverage, and there's going to be a huge number of employers in this province who are going to be relieved—and some of the wealthiest employers: the banks, the insurance companies, financial institutions, call centres—of any obligation to participate in the pooling of funds necessary to finance a healthy and effective workers' compensation WSIB system.

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The time allocation motion that the government brought was regrettable. During the debate on the time allocation motion I recall, along with my colleague Paul Miller and other New Democrats, pointing out that the committee process was an ideal venue in which to address the concerns that people have expressed about this legislation—an ideal venue. It was precisely in committee—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Oh, the member for London–Fanshawe, Mr. Ramal, is muttering, “We did, we did.” Oh, horse feathers, Mr. Ramal, because the time allocation motion gave the committee one day for public participation and one day for clause-by-clause, which is going to come on November 24. There was no opportunity for people who had concerns about the legislation to be responded to in an intelligent, rational way to, quite frankly, calm them and help them understand that this isn't some movement that's designed, notwithstanding the CFIB's best efforts and my dear friends Ms. Swift and Ms. Andrew I say sarcastically, because I don't think they are, although I would like them to be, but I don't know what more I can do to make them want to be my friends.

My experience, based on the calls we got in the office, is that there's a huge amount of misinformation about this legislation. We're getting calls from small, family-run retailers indicating that they have been led to believe that this was going to draw them into the WSIB system. We had to explain that no, that's not the purpose of Bill 119, that Bill 119 is designed to cover de facto construction workers who are working in an inherently dangerous occupation, trade or profession and who don't have workers' comp coverage; nor are they part of the accident prevention process that participation in WSIB provides.

For the life me, I don't understand why the government, in its time allocation motion, didn't provide for several days of public hearings. I indicated quite clearly that I disagreed with the Conservative position on this. The New Democrats agreed with me. The Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council has been struggling for 15 years to get this legislation enacted, and we, the NDP, supported their efforts, but that doesn't mean that there shouldn't be an adequate amount of political discourse, exchange, either here in this legislative chamber or in the committee.

The government could have provided for but a few more days of public hearings, and there undoubtedly would have been more advocates for the legislation appearing, as well as people who were critical of the legislation. I say that's fine. As I said, New Democrats weren't afraid of the argument being made by the Conservatives. We don't agree. We think they're operating on some false premises, but the fact is that in a parliamentary process that's why you have opposition parties. It's only in the darkest days of the politburo that everybody agreed, or at least that was the presentation being made.

So I don't understand why this government would not have in its time allocation motion—I still would have opposed it because I don't support time allocation motions, never have—accommodated those people who want to be critical of the bill. There are people who are going to be critical. God bless them. Quite frankly, there are elements of the bill that New Democrats are being critical of: one, that while this brings in a huge number of construction building trades workers into workers' comp-

WSIB coverage, it still leaves thousands upon thousands upon thousands of workers, assuming they still have their jobs tomorrow, who are not covered by WSIB because they're in workplaces that are, by legislation, exempted from coverage, notwithstanding—and again, during the debate around Bill 119 on second reading, we talked about how the financial services sector is one of the areas. I've got call centres down in my riding where I come from. They employ a whole lot of women, and women who are middle-aged. Carpal tunnel syndrome and other repetitive strain injuries, RSI, are rampant in that sector, yet there's no access to workers' comp, which means they're sweet out of luck, as Mr. Yakabuski mentioned a couple of weeks ago when he used the abbreviation SOL. These workers have to be told that they can sue if they want, but what that means is hiring a lawyer and paying tens of thousands of dollars in retainer and risking not winning at the end of the day and being no further ahead.

Workers' compensation is a historic system. It dates to the earliest part of the 20th century. It was a revolutionary proposition. The goal was to ensure that no worker in this province who was injured, maimed or slaughtered in the workplace would have to litigate and prove negligence. It's a no-fault system. The issue of causation isn't relevant to the compensation. It should be very relevant, obviously, to make sure accidents don't happen again and injuries don't happen again.

So we remain concerned about the exemption of—and the language in the drafting. Again, because tomorrow is the day for the submission of amendments, we don't know whether the government is going to respond to the concerns about the wording of the renovator section of the bill. The New Democrats raised that. It talks about "independent operators ... who perform no construction work other than exempt home renovation work." Well, does that mean in the last 12 months? In the last two years? Or, they have done new construction work, but they promised to only do renovation work down the road? Quite frankly, it's a very clumsily drafted, ineffectively drafted, section of the bill that generates fears that this will become the new big loophole—and for that matter, the obvious proposition that the roofer putting new shingles on my two-and-a-half-storey old house in Welland is performing as dangerous a job as the roofer putting shingles on a two-and-a-half-storey house in a subdivision that's being newly built and is new home construction. Far be it from me to impute motive—you know that; I'm loath to do that—but it begs the question as to who the government was accommodating with the exemption. I don't know. They haven't been forthcoming. Maybe if there had been a couple more days of committee hearings, we would have been able to wring it out of them, like in those old detective movies with the bright lamps and the good cop and bad cop, with somebody hammering his billy club on the table and the other one saying, "Here, pal, have a coffee and a cigarette." We might have been able to get it out of them. As to the motive—and I'm not imputing motive; I'm just asking

what it is because I don't know what it is. We're not suggesting it's anything less than benign, although I think you can read my mind, can't you? It's like those old MAD Magazine cartoons: what he's saying and what he really wants to be saying. He's saying, "I'm not suggesting that it's anything less than benign," but what he's really saying is that second balloon above his head.

So, we have concerns about the renovation; so do people who participated in the public hearings.

The LIUNA representation, which, while Mr. Miller was sitting in on the hearings, I read carefully—I'm impressed with it, pleased with it.

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So for 15 years, the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council has been looking for this bill. We support the proposition, but notwithstanding that we support it, we also support the right to have the matter debated and we support the right of members of this Legislature to disagree.

We believe that an honest exchange would have done far more to enlighten people than the jackboot tactics of harsh time allocation. The problem is that Mr. Runciman, in his motion, in the preamble, forces those who would want to support his motion to support propositions that this is a new tax and that it's a new tax on small construction companies. The preamble to Mr. Runciman's motion requires people who support it to concur with his proposition that whether or not the bill will improve workplace safety is questionable. I can't adopt that position.

I think that inclusion in the WSIB system, participation in the workers' comp community, does improve workplace safety. Furthermore, I believe that fair contribution to the pool of funding for WSIB and workers' comp is incredibly important if we're going to maintain a healthy workers' compensation system wherein workers can be fairly and adequately compensated—workers who suffer injuries, who are maimed, poisoned, slaughtered in their workplaces.

So by virtue of my and our caucus's opposition to this motion, we in no way, shape or form endorse this government's approach by way of time allocation to this matter. We fundamentally disagree with the Conservatives about the interpretation of the legislation, but unlike the Liberals, we're not afraid of a debate. Unlike the Liberals, we're not afraid to have issues explored fully. Unlike the Liberals, we in the NDP believe that an honest and thorough exchange is the healthiest way to develop policy in this province and that adequate public hearings would have enabled those who are fearful about this bill to have those fears calmed by rational explanation and by thorough analysis.

My fear with the time allocation motion, and this bill being rammed through committee, is that important amendments that ought to be made, that are consistent with the interests of working women and men, the interests of building trades workers and the building trades council—my concern is that by this government ramming this bill through, those interests of the building trades and

their workers, and the workers who are contemplated as being new members of this WSIB community protected by WSIB coverage, won't be addressed by way of amendments that otherwise would have been put to the bill to enhance the protection and correct shortcomings in this bill when it comes to workers' health and safety and their protection in workplace. Because, you see, the same time allocation motion means that most of the amendments that are put forward on table won't even be debated, won't even be read. This, of course, is a guillotine when it comes to that process.

The New Democrats support Bill 119. We wish we had an opportunity to more fully examine it with a view to ensuring that appropriate amendments were put forward and debated and voted upon, and hopefully passed. We support the right of workers to be covered by WSIB, and we believe that WSIB participation, yes, enhances workplace safety. We will not, however, be supporting Mr. Runciman's motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Vic Dhillon: The legislation that this motion refers to, Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, has been through wide consultation over a number of years. It is based on results of these consultations conducted over the past few years that the government believes extending mandatory coverage in construction will benefit the overall construction industry.

I want to talk about what this legislation aims to do, and I want you to know that I have been a part of the debate on this bill in the Legislature. Over the past two days I have been a part of public hearings on this bill where we have heard from many stakeholders from the construction industry. We have heard from labour groups, employer groups and employee groups.

We're taking steps to promote health and safety in the Ontario construction industry by extending Workplace Safety and Insurance Act coverage to categories of individuals currently not covered. Extending Workplace Safety and Insurance Act coverage to more individuals in the construction industry will help to fight the underground economy. If passed, our legislation will help to level the playing field in the construction industry and will be good for both construction employers and employees. This legislation is about making sure Ontario workers have the protection they need if they get injured on the job. This legislation further proves that the health and safety of Ontario workers is our number one priority at the Ministry of Labour.

Underground economic practices threaten health and safety, undermine labour standards and erode construction quality. Throughout our consultations, we have heard that this legislation will help level the playing field in the construction industry. Right now, there are some workers who come to construction sites and are not covered if they get injured. For companies that are not currently paying their WSIB premiums, this puts businesses that play by the rules at a competitive disadvantage.

Throughout the consultations, we have heard that there are some bad-apple companies who are not paying their fair share, not paying their premiums for insurance. We have heard that the changes proposed in this legislation will make sure that if workers do get injured or hurt, they are covered and have benefits in place to take care of themselves and their families. We have also heard that businesses need time to adjust to these proposed changes. That is part of the reason for the proposed phase-in of fees, with full implementation in 2012, so businesses can make plans in advance.

We're taking steps to promote health and safety in the Ontario construction industry by extending the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, WSIA, coverage to categories of individuals currently not covered. Extending Workplace Safety and Insurance Act coverage to more individuals in the construction industry will help to fight the underground economy.

This legislation will assist small businesses. This is part of our government's effort to help small business in the province of Ontario.

We're lowering the cost of doing business in Ontario. In the 2008 budget, the government announce \$750 million in tax measures over four years, starting in 2007-08, that would provide support for businesses, including Ontario's struggling manufacturing sector. These tax measures are in addition to the government's plan to eliminate the capital tax for all businesses on July 1, 2010, and to reduce high business education tax rates across the province by \$540 million over seven years.

This is not all we're doing. We're cutting red tape in order to make it easier for small businesses to operate and to do business in Ontario. In the 2005 throne speech, the government identified reducing red tape as its top priority. The small business ministry staff has been working with the Ministry of Government Services staff to reduce red tape through the paper burden reduction initiative to minimize the amount of red tape that small businesses face in their dealings with the provincial government.

Our government also has a variety of programs and resources designed to support our small business and medium-sized enterprises. There's a lot that our government has done to assist small business and there's a lot more to be done.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Interjection: Part two.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Part two. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity today to speak to Bill 119. It's a pleasure to rise and speak in support of my colleague's motion to reopen the public debate on Bill 119.

Since the introduction of this bill, my party and I have repeatedly made the case that this bill will only punish the backbone of Ontario's economy: our small business. We have been flooded by hundreds of e-mails and letters from small businesses around Ontario saying that they

are against this bill. The government keeps reading one letter of support. Is that the best they can do: only one person who's willing to go on the record to support it? Let's look at what this bill will do to small business.

The government claims that this bill will improve workplace safety, which we all know is a bunch of nonsense simply because those who would be newly protected are office workers who never set a foot on a construction site. The minister claims that this legislation will level the playing field; however, I don't believe it would. In fact, this bill would actually tilt the playing field in favour of big labour, big firms and big Liberal donors. At the moment, all construction companies, both big and small, have an exemption for owners, directors and executive officers, but with this legislation all firms will be required to pay to insure their office workers. Proportionately speaking, this tax is a much larger hit for a small firm than a large one.

This minister also states that this piece of legislation would help to crack down on those who are cheating the system. I, along with many in this Legislature, would agree that we must do everything we can to drive those out of the underground economy. However, the Ministry of Labour already has the power and tools to crack down on cheats. All they have to do is perform more audits and get out of the office and into the field. In reality, the first people who are going to be impacted by this piece of legislation are those in the above-ground economy, not the cheaters, and the WSIB already knows who those legitimate guys are, because they are registered with them. The legislation allows cheaters to prosper while cracking down on the good guys, the low-hanging fruit. The day after this bill is enacted, the WSIB will ask the above-ground operators to pay more on their owners, officers and directors. The bad guys in the underground economy aren't going to surface anytime soon. In the meantime, office workers will be footing the bill of the WSIB cheaters, as owners, directors and executive officers are a far much easier group to find than the actual cheaters.

This is why, on this side of House, we believe that the government shouldn't waste their time on this type of program when their energy and resources should be spent on creating a named insurance system so that we know exactly who is covered and who is not. In fact, I heard the Minister of Labour today advocate for such a system if someone could show him how it would work, a named insurance system, and we intend to work with him to do that.

If the minister were sincere about that, he wouldn't be targeting owners of small business; he wouldn't be targeting people who have to work even when they are hurt and can't get the full benefit of WSIB coverage even though they are paying for it. The minister also wouldn't be forcing executives to give up 24/7, 365-day-a-year coverage, far superior coverage that they pay for separately, for a more expensive coverage that doesn't offer them the same protection they need.

This bill is all about tilting the playing field in the construction industry in favour of big labour and big Liberal

donors. No one should be fooled about this bill. This bill will be one of the biggest tax increases ever levied on small business in this province. If implemented—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I just caution members to not go too far in impugning motive. Thank you.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Point taken.

If implemented as written, it may put many of these small businesses out of business. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has indicated to us that, from their members, they have calculated this levy will cost each employer up to \$11,000 a year on their small business. Despite that, the government is still forcing it through—this from the Premier who said he would not be raising new taxes; the finance minister, the Treasurer, said the same just last month. The financial impact on our small businesses will be huge in this province. If passed, this act will put many people out of business and will do nothing to take the unscrupulous people out of the equation.

Some people have raised the issue: Why weren't more small business people here to oppose it? We advocate that most of these small business people are out there today, at this moment, trying to make a living. They don't have high-paid lobbyists that are able to come and advocate on their behalf. So I do want to pay tribute to the home builders from Muskoka who are here with us today in the gallery, who took the time, spent the whole day here, and lobbied and talked to many of the members from all sides of the House.

This will impose a new tax on small business. This government should not be trying to tax small businesses, which employ more than half of Ontarians. Moreover, this government should not tax these businesses at a time when Ontario needs to maintain all the jobs it can.

I can't figure out why they are rushing this bill through so quickly. With an implementation date of four years from now, they have more than adequate time to work with small business, to work with the opposition and to work with the stakeholders to make the improvements to this bill that it needs, but to date they have indicated no desire to do so. We have something back home that we call the "red face" test, and I don't think this will pass.

Anyway, we will be making amendments to the bill that will remove owners and company directors from mandatory WSIB coverage. We will also be making an amendment that will make insurance coverage mandatory for all construction workers, but they will have the option of finding private insurance instead of WSIB coverage.

On this side, we also believe that the government needs to refocus its energy on developing that named insurance system, like they do with OHIP, so that WSIB knows who is insured and who isn't. We think this just makes common sense. As I say, the minister himself earlier today said that he would look at something like that.

In closing, we don't believe that imposing a new tax on small business will do anything other than drive more

of them out of business. We support going after the cheats and deadbeats and the underground economy, but we believe that this government has the power to do so now, and they need to use the rules that already exist.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I'd ask the table to stop the clock for just a moment so we can carry out a matter of other business.

I beg to inform the House that the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka has filed notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer given to his question on November 6 from the Minister of Labour concerning WSIB mandatory coverage. This matter will be debated today at 6 o'clock, and I'm sure everyone will want to be here to listen.

Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: First, I'd just like to start off by expressing my deep concern about the lack of public participation in this bill and the time allocation motion, which we feel, from our party's perspective, was totally unfair and pushed through quickly. I concur with my colleagues in the official opposition that several days could have been set aside throughout this province for consultation with small business owners and other affected parties.

Given that, I'd also like to say that we in the NDP have discussed this at length, and why we feel the legislation is necessary, starting off with the ongoing abuse in the system of independent owner exemption: no restrictions on who can be classified as an IO, and workers being forced to choose between having a job or having coverage.

In the past 15 years, the construction industry has been substantially restructured by the practice of hiring and subcontracting to independent operators. This legislation, in our opinion, will help the WSIB on its Road to Zero mandate, the elimination of lost-time injuries and work-related deaths. As I say that, it may help it on its road, but anyone in this House who believes that injuries and lost-time accidents won't happen is a little naive. Speaking from my own experience in heavy industry for over 30 years, that will not happen. Injuries happen. People are human. They make errors. Machinery breaks down. Things happen.

With thousands of unregistered independent operators in construction, there is no method for these workers to receive health and safety training. Health and safety training is the lifeblood of safety.

In the place where I worked, as early as the mid-1970s we had monthly safety meetings. We had safety tours; we had stewards assigned to go with management on tours to recognize unsafe working conditions or unsafe working practices—extremely beneficial to our lost-time and injured workers numbers.

But I must say, I myself have seen, witnessed fatalities. I've seen a lot of lost fingers and toes and broken bones. You name it; I've seen it over the years.

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So when opposition people say this will have no impact on safety, I disagree totally. The WSIB has in-

spectors who go out. They also have connections to health clinics; they have connections to other health organizations in the province that give extended coverage under WSIB that may go on for years, as opposed to private insurance companies, which have limits. As you well know if you've ever dealt with an insurance company on claims, it can be very difficult to get that cheque. I know from my own experience that if you make three or four claims, then you become on the high-risk area and it's very difficult to collect your money. I would assume that under these private plans—a lot of people who presented in front of this committee said, "Well, you know, I have a private plan that covers me more, 24 hours a day." I'm not sure why you would need coverage 24 hours a day unless you are working three shifts. I assume that the WSIB covers you when you're on a work site, and that's the only coverage I ever received over the years. I didn't have coverage driving my car home unless I had personal life insurance or other situations. So I'm not quite sure about this 24/7 argument they have been putting forward.

Loopholes in this legislation: I would say that I personally oppose the exemption for home renovations. I think it wasn't well thought out, and I think this government, in committee, should change the home exemption renovation clause, because that's going to encourage more small outfits to go into that line of work under that umbrella to avoid the situation of paying WSIB premiums.

I also am not overly thrilled with the executive officer part of the legislation. I know that in large companies, you have to own or be a certain percentage—I believe it's 30%—and then you are considered an operating officer. But I know that in a lot of smaller companies, superintendents go to job sites. They could be owners, they could be the president, they could be CEO, but they're still actually functioning and working within that environment. A lot of these owner-operators also have a hands-on mentality, where they like to take part in it; maybe they even like to lead a work crew and be on the job to instruct in the way things are going, to speed things up, or maybe they're on the job for financial reasons—they're falling behind on their contract. For whatever reason, they do show up at job sites, and they should be covered too.

There is an argument that if they're in a tower or in a large company, they don't go to the job sites; that's quite possible. But I don't know anyone who owns a company and has never gone to a job site. If they do go to the job site, maybe the WSIB could make a percentage. If you're going to be 30% on the job site and 70% in the office, then those premiums should be the example to go by, so they don't have to pay a full premium when they're not on the job site 100% of the time.

It also levels the playing field so that everyone is playing by the same rules. Not having coverage gives some people a competitive advantage in bidding for work, because they don't have the cost. Why should the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act be the

source of economic advantage between similar firms in the same industry? We in the NDP don't agree with that; we believe in a fair playing field.

This legislation provides greater certainty and clarity of coverage. There may be as much, it has an estimated, as \$350 million in unpaid premiums. It erodes the construction coverage base and drives up costs for employers who pay into the system. Also, this legislation could lead to lower costs for legitimate contractors now paying astronomical costs into the system. The construction industry has been calling for action on this for over 15 years.

A point that was brought up by one of the former speakers about the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades—I must say that of all the presentations, 75% of the people who presented in this limited exposure were from large unions that have large numbers of workers under their umbrella. I would say it took up a good chunk of the province's workforce, and they all seem to be in favour of Bill 119, but they do have some concerns which I've addressed before and will address before I'm finished.

But one that really stood out for me was brought up by the Ontario Council of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, when they said, "First, if passed, Bill 119 will close the loopholes in the existing legislation which exempt independent operators, sole proprietors and company executives from mandatory WSIB. These loopholes have led to widespread abuse in the system." In fact, many of their members have come to their office complaining that their employers want them to sign declaration forms stating that they are independent operators so that their employers won't have to pay WSIB premiums.

We vividly recall the example of José and Maria, two married new Canadians from Venezuela who joined this union to work in the residential painting industry. When they reported to work with one of our smaller residential painting companies, they were clearly told, "Either you sign the form or you can't work for us." They were perplexed and frustrated as to why their employer wanted them to be classified as independent operators when they reported as employees and knew absolutely nothing about independently operated businesses. They were also shocked to learn about the precarious position they would be put in if they signed this form and were later seriously injured on the job site. They were very worried. Construction workers in this province should not have to be forced to make a decision between having a job or having WSIB coverage. Ontario construction workers deserve better.

Another incidence was a drywall contractor who informed us that they had each of their employees buy one share in the company for one dollar. As such, they were now part owners of the company and were given ridiculous titles, like director of coordination or director of policy and production, in order to avoid paying WSIB premiums under the executive exemption. It's unbelievable that people would go to that length to avoid their responsibility to workers.

According to the union, there are too many unscrupulous contractors working in construction to allow for the type of loophole that can always be manipulated and lead to these kinds of abuses. This bill has to be very clear: If you are involved in the construction industry, WSIB coverage has to be mandatory. This is why, although we are in support of the bill, we are against the type of exemption that currently exists in the bill, particularly the home renovator exemption, as it no doubt will lead to manipulation and abuse. That is not part of this bill. It's mentioned in the bill, but I think this government should take another look at it and not have any exemptions, except for chief operating officers, who in our opinion should pay a percentage. For instance, if they're on the job site 25% of the time, their premium should be according to the amount of time on the job site.

The second reason is, as I said earlier and will reiterate, that this bill, without question, will lead to greater health and safety education and training of construction workers and will assist the WSIB in meeting their Road to Zero mandate, and will hopefully eliminate some of the lost-time injuries and accidents. These workers will have access to all sections of the WSIB as far as rehabilitation and clinics and all the things that go along with WSIB coverage.

As I stated earlier, the number of unregistered independent operators working in the construction industry today is staggering, and there's no method whatsoever in place for these workers to receive any form of health and safety training. WSIB statistics also clearly reveal that the majority of workplace injuries and fatalities in the construction industry fall upon workers who have not had proper health and safety training. In other words, a properly trained worker is a safe worker. If this bill is passed, and all independent operators have to apply for WSIB coverage, this will force them to have direct contact with the WSIB and, by extension, with organizations such as the Construction Safety Association of Ontario for safety training.

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So, as we move along, the number of people who presented to this committee were just—it was the same theme from all of them. They were concerned about the two loopholes, the home renovator exemption and also the operating officer's exemption, so they wanted those closed.

This home renovator exemption could become the new independent operator problem. Exemptions should be removed or become more restrictive. There may be liability issues for the homeowner under subsection 26(2) of the existing act. This could happen. The point of the act is to ensure that the worker cannot sue the employer. Thus, under Bill 119, the home renovator could potentially sue the homeowner for negligence. The legislation must clarify who is responsible to pay WSIB premiums. Workers should not be forced or coerced into paying premiums.

The implementation date of January 1, 2012, is too far away. As my colleagues in the official opposition pointed

out, with four years to go, I think we would have had more time to discuss this very important bill.

Don't get me wrong. The NDP is not against small business owners. We support small business owners and their right to have their day in court. Their opinion is valued by our party, valued by the opposition and I'm sure the government, but this process has not given them the ability to have their day. They have to continue to struggle, come to Toronto for a two-day event which, before half of them even knew, was over; and the e-mails are flying in, and I think out of due respect for them and for the rest of Ontarians, they should have had their say.

I'd like to compliment my colleague Mr. Kormos from Welland for his wonderful presentation. Mr. Kormos has a way of bringing a human factor into all of his presentations, which I am going to cherish during my years or time with him as I pick up on his expertise. He's one of the best orators I've ever dealt with.

I must say my frustration continues—I've only been here a little over a year in this House—as I see that, once again, the NDP are doing what's best, in their opinion, for the people of Ontario. We are voting with the government. When we, as a party, see something that benefits the people of Ontario, we put aside our partisan politics. We do.

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller: The member laughs over there. That's amazing that he would laugh, considering—I've been here a year, and we've supported them on seven bills, I'm proud to say. They have supported us on none. They have shot down our bills in committee. They have shot down the Conservatives in committee. The only bill that I think they're going to agree to—and it was a good bill—was the member from Oxford when he brought forward signs on farm property to advertise their produce, and that may get stopped, too.

What I really have disdain for—maybe I'm a little naive, but when I came here, I thought we were all supposed to work together for the betterment of the people of Ontario. That's not happening. It doesn't happen every day in here, and I continue to shake my head at some of the things that go on in here, and this particular case that I'm on now is mind-boggling. You would think that a government, from an economic standpoint—and I'm talking about, of course, the grandparents, which isn't really related to this bill, but—

Interjection: No, but it's an example.

Mr. Paul Miller: It's an example.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Some of those grandparents worked in construction.

Mr. Paul Miller: Yes, some of those grandparents used to work in construction. And now, at the end of their life—

Interjections.

Mr. Paul Miller: At the end of their life the rug is being pulled out in from under them and they're going to have to work until they're 85 to bring up, God bless them, their grandchildren who are in distress. It's really sad when I have to stand up day in and day out and fight

for a few hundred dollars for these ex-construction workers.

Mr. John O'Toole: Madam Meilleur doesn't care. She doesn't care.

Mr. Paul Miller: They don't care and it's sad, but they'll be willing to put those hard-working construction workers' grandkids into a foster home and pay \$1,500 a month, or into a group home and pay \$176 a day or—oh, I'm getting off topic, I can see.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I think we're stretching it just a bit. Okay? Back to the motion, please.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your indulgence, but I don't know how many of them have applied for WSIB. I don't think any of them; I think they probably don't qualify. That's a word I've been hearing a lot around here: "You don't qualify."

In closing, I would just like to say that it was a privilege today to stand up with Mr. Kormos and talk about worker protection, worker safety in this province. I am hoping it's moving in the right direction. We do need some amendments in this bill. I hope the government is willing to listen to some of our amendments and adopt some of them instead of railroading everything they think is right for the people of Ontario. Believe it or not, the people on the other side of this room, my fellow friends from the opposition party, the NDP, some of us have good ideas too, and we just want to share them with the governing party. Hopefully they'll take a couple of our ideas and maybe run with them, or they may appear a year later, after everyone else has forgotten about it, and resurface under their jurisdiction. It's unfortunate.

I would like to say thank you for the time today. I hope we can discuss this at more length in committee. I hope that we can work hand in hand with the government and bring forth some of our good ideas and some of our concerns to rectify this bill that I don't think is what I would call perfect—far from it—but it is a move in the right direction. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you for giving me the chance to speak and comment on the PC opposition day motion. I heard the Leader of the Opposition speaking earlier this afternoon about WSIB coverage. As you know and many people know—I've said it many different times—I was a small business owner for many years. Five to 10 to 60 people worked with me at my company. We used to do different types of work, and these types of work sometimes required one to use some kind of equipment or travel from place to place, so sometimes the workers who used to work with me exposed themselves to dangerous equipment. I was always concerned about their protection, about their safety. I always used to go to training sessions and read books and manuals to see how we could create safety for the people who worked with me because I was one of them, working with them day and night, in order to make sure the business ran smoothly and safely.

I listened to the Leader of the Opposition speaking about safety and about small business, and as I mentioned, I was a small business owner. I know how much small business owners contribute to the economy of Ontario, how much effort and time they put in in order to be successful at the job they do on a daily basis. Therefore I'm showing my support for small business and I appreciate the job they do.

The core of our economy is built on small business. But the most important thing, we have to remember, is the safety of our workers across the province of Ontario. I was listening one day to Mr. Kormos speaking about protection of workers. A worker is a worker. Whether you work in a small company or in a large company, you require protection; it doesn't matter where or when or the circumstances. For the people who work on construction sites, construction sites are very difficult. They work outside, they use heavy equipment and they are subject to many different dangers, obstacles and equipment. So therefore our duty, our responsibility, is to create some kind of safety mechanism for them.

1700

I listened. I got the chance to serve in the committee the last two days—Monday and Tuesday. We listened to many different people who came from different groups to present different sides of the spectrum, some supporting the bill and others against the bill. Everyone out of this group eloquently presented their views.

I listened to the member opposite speaking about how the safety mechanism can be replaced by private insurance. I was in the committee and a question was asked to one of the presenters against Bill 119, "How many people in your organization are covered by that insurance?" She couldn't answer; she had no answer for that question. So this opened the big question to all of us: What about the people who work in that company? They're open, not protected, not being provided a safety mechanism which is badly needed if somebody gets injured or hurt on the job.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, yourself, myself, many members of this House always welcome many constituents who come to our offices complaining about many different issues. I'll give you an example: One day I was in my office. Somebody came to my office and he was complaining. He went to work with a company and was working with them under the assumption he was covered by WSIB. Then when he got hurt, he came to us when he discovered that he was not covered, was not insured. Nobody looked after him. He came complaining because no insurance was in place to cover him; there was no WSIB coverage so he came seeking support and help. He has two options—either go to the ODSP or go to Ontario Works—to be able to receive some money to support his family, the people he looks after.

Sometimes it's difficult to be able to enrol in ODSP. You have to prove a lot of things. And if you want to be a Ontario Works recipient, you have to have lots of proof and you cannot own certain assets or money etc. It's not fair for that person who has been working for that company for many years.

After that, he discovered he was working as a subcontractor in that company. This was the way, I guess, for the owner of that company to get around the rules and regulations: Give him the job and not give him the protection he needed in order to protect himself.

It's bad, and I think every person who works in the province and gives his or her thought, skills or knowledge to this province should be protected. That's why we listened to many different people speaking about private insurance. We learned in this committee that private insurance doesn't provide continuity of health service, and WSIB is the only mechanism to be able to assess that worker—if he has been working from job to job, WSIB will cover him all the time. If that person—who hopefully wouldn't be injured—does get hurt, they will be able to assess his situation and then will know if he's eligible to be covered or not.

Therefore, I think WSIB is the only united mechanism that has been in place for the last hundred years to protect the people of this province. You cannot just depend on an insurance company. As you know, most of the time when you apply for service or coverage with an insurance company, they give you a hard time. They're not responsible for continuing to look after you if you do not fit under their criteria; most of the time there's a lot of fine print when you sign the insurance policy which makes you ineligible to be protected or to be covered under that insurance. Therefore, when we have coverage under WSIB, which is a non-profit organization founded in the province of Ontario to protect hard-working Ontarians, they can go to work with peace of mind that if something happens to them, somebody will look after them.

I'm going to vote against this motion. This is not a motion we can support because it will be against the workers of this province. I know the members opposite stated many times that this bill will bankrupt businesses, this motion will not allow the people to be prosperous at the job they do, but I don't agree with that. I think it's our obligation as a government, our obligation as the people elected to this place, to protect the workers in the province of Ontario. I'm not going to support this motion, and I hope the members opposite change their mind and we can work together.

We heard a lot of recommendations from many different presenters who came to the committee. Some of them talked about an office executive who cannot go to work. Hopefully, after we collect all this information and consult with WSIB, we can have some exemptions for people who never go to construction sites, so we have some kind of flexibility in order to address a logical approach. The most important thing is that the workers in the province of Ontario should be protected.

As I mentioned many different times, I listened in the committee, and people were saying we don't listen to the opposition, we're not listening to people from both sides of the spectrum. Many people came, more than 20 or 30 groups, representing thousands and thousands of businesses. They talked about their issues and they talked about their organizations. They told us what they think.

So I think that whether it was two days here or one day in London or Ottawa or whatever, the most important thing is that all the main representatives of the major organizations across the province of Ontario came before our committee and spoke and advised our committee about many different elements that should be changed or taken into consideration when we go to clause-by-clause.

I hope we can collect all this information from the people who came before us in the last couple of days and come up with a bill that can protect the people of Ontario, can protect the workers, and can be an example that will be felt across the whole nation.

I want to say that I'm against this motion and I'm going to vote against it. I'm going to work hard to make sure we have a WSIB bill to protect the workers across the province of Ontario and a bill we'll be proud of, not just today, but in generations to come.

In the end our focus is the workers; our focus is the safety of our people. That's the aim of the bill, and that's why I'm not supporting this motion.

Thank you for allowing me to speak.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Members, I draw your attention to the west end of the Speaker's gallery, where we're joined by the Honourable Hugh Edighoffer, Speaker from June 4, 1985, to November 19, 1990, the member for Perth in the 29th to the 34th Parliaments. Welcome, sir.

Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: As a former Minister of Labour, I'm certainly pleased to join the debate and discussion on this opposition day motion.

I hope the Liberals understand what this motion actually says. It actually speaks about the concerns that are still outstanding about Bill 119, an Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, and then it simply calls upon the Legislature of Ontario to extend public hearings on the bill to communities across Ontario in early 2009 and allow all members to speak to the bill before it becomes law.

It's obvious that the people speaking today have no idea what they're speaking about. They don't realize that they have been, I guess, guillotined in the same way every member of this House has been and prevented from going out and listening to people throughout the province of Ontario and hearing the very legitimate concerns and making some real, honest effort to forge some compromises to ensure that the very legitimate concerns are addressed.

A bill like this takes lots of consultation. It has not been done at all. This bill was attempted by the Liberal government in 2006. They faced significant opposition, and for some reason they've brought it back now in 2008. Again, there was no consultation, although we do hear that there was consultation with the unions. We know that the business community had no opportunity at all for any input. I find that unbelievable.

1710

When we were in office, when we were in power, I can remember the days and weeks and months of consul-

tation that we had when we made changes to legislation. We met with unions; we met with business people. These people have just totally neglected and ignored the fact that the people who pay the bills certainly should have an opportunity for some input. I'm simply appalled that the Liberals would just say no, that two days of public hearings is enough. They're going to be in Toronto. We're not going to travel the province. They have totally ignored the voices of the people in this province. But we see that happening more and more. In fact, I would say to you that recently it's déjà vu all over again.

I am reminded of 1990 to 1995, a time when we saw the politicization of what was then the Workers' Compensation Board like we had never seen it before. It had started under the Liberal government. Then, of course, we made changes. We overhauled it. We gave it the name WSIB, Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. We made sure that the changes reflected input from all of the stakeholders.

We're going back to what I would tell you is politicization of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. This bill is unfair. It's unfair to people in the province of Ontario. As it is currently written, it perpetuates a tax grab on the construction sector, and it needs to be addressed.

We have all received letters from our constituents about the financial impact of this bill, and certainly that needs to be considered. For the minister to say this is all about safety, I would want to tell the minister that he doesn't know what he's talking about. In fact, I've been pretty disappointed in his attempts to explain or defend the legislation. He has not even been able to do so, and the reason he can't do so is because he never engaged in any thoughtful or extensive deliberations with anybody who was going to be impacted by this legislation if they happened to represent the business sector.

This is becoming a very common practice in this Legislature when there is any legislation introduced by the McGuinty government. They only listen to the people that they know are going to support them.

I don't know what's happened to democracy, because this is a government that used to champion democratic renewal. They were going to change the way this House operated. They were going to get lots of public input in order to ensure the best legislation for all of the people in the province. All they do today is trample on democracy. They don't allow enough time to debate, to discuss, to get input and then make any meaningful changes to the legislation. As I say, it's déjà vu all over again. I hope that it leads in 2011 to the defeat of this government, because they are ignoring the voices of a majority of people in the province of Ontario. You just need to know that if you continue down this path, you will suffer the consequences.

It's been just appalling to see that this minister and this government have never done a detailed cost-impact analysis whatsoever. That also happens now with legislation. They don't bother to look at the impact, the consequences, and to consider them. They just decide they're going to bulldoze and ram everything through.

So this is what we've got now: We've got a bill that's going to have a very unfair and huge financial impact on many small businesses throughout the province of Ontario. Any reasonable, thoughtful person knows that a bill of this magnitude, a bill with this type of implication, needs to be discussed and debated for at least six to eight months, and here we've had this bill here for a couple of weeks and they decide they are going to guillotine and cut off any further debate. I am simply appalled.

This bill leaves so many unanswered questions. I want to know, why is this bill being fast-tracked in 2008 when it's not scheduled for implementation until 2012? One theory that has emerged and that I've been hearing a lot about recently is the fact that you have mismanaged the WSIB. The unfunded liability is now reaching a historic high—we hear it might be as high as even \$8 billion, \$13 billion, \$15 billion—and you've got a real problem. Under our leadership, the unfunded liability went down. Under your government, you are facing a crisis. So maybe what you're looking to do is some Enron-style accounting. Maybe you want to mitigate this unprecedented spike in the UFL. How could you do this? It's been suggested that maybe what you want to do—and that's the reason for your haste in passing it in 2008—is create a fictitious, overstated stream of potential future revenues. You want to build that into the unfunded liability projections by the end of 2008, and by magic the unfunded liability is going to be lowered. Well, eventually, in four or five years, you will be found out, if that is what you're doing. Your fictitious accounting's going to be discovered. But obviously it's not the problem that you have today—and you've got a problem today.

I don't know why the haste, why you won't listen to the people in the province of Ontario, but I would say to you, you're making a grave mistake by not consulting with the people who are going to be impacted by this bill. I don't like to hear people say, "Shame on you," but I'm going to say to, shame on you. People in this province deserve the opportunity to put their legitimate concerns on the record. They also have the right to be heard by this government, and you've refused to do so.

Please, support the motion today. All we ask is that you listen to the people in the province of Ontario who have elected you and do what's best.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. David Zimmer: I'm happy to join in this debate. We should move on and get this bill passed. The thinking behind the bill of arranging for or bringing in universal coverage for the workers who aren't covered and doing something about these artificial schemes to keep certain workers off coverage has been talked about, debated and thought about for years and years in this Legislature. It's now time to move ahead and put this behind us and get the coverages in place for the people they should be in place for.

I want to make a couple of points. First, whenever a piece of legislation comes before this body, I think the

first thing we've got to ask ourselves is, what problem is the legislation designed to address? That's what this body is all about, fixing problems. Here are a couple of problems that this legislation is designed to fix, and these are problems that have been around Ontario for years and years.

First of all, there's the issue of the coverage loopholes in our system. What do I mean by coverage loopholes in our system? An insidious practice has grown up where some contractors, some employers are misclassifying employees. What they're saying to these employees—they're coming on to the construction site, they should be employed as workers of the employer and then they would be covered by the WSIB. But what some, not all, employers are doing is putting pressure on the employee: "Look, if you want to work on this site, I want you to set up a relationship with me where I'm going to consider you as an independent contractor. And because you're an independent contractor, I pay you a base rate and I don't have to cover the WSIB payments." By misclassifying the worker, that's an abuse of the expectation that the worker, if he falls victim to an accident on the site, is going to be covered for those injuries and the consequences of those injuries. The employer, in my view in a very short-sighted way, is saying, "If I classify the employee as an independent contractor, I'm going to save some money. I don't have to make the WSIB payments" and so forth and so on. But what happens is that the employee is placed at some real serious risk: no coverage in the case of an accident.

Now it gets even a little more insidious because typically in these situations where an employer has asked someone to, in effect, commit to being an independent contractor, more often than not those persons are the vulnerable workers—new immigrants, people who desperately need a job. They don't have any real choice. They've got some bills to pay. They're feeling the pressure. "Anything to get a job—sure, I'm an independent worker." It's that very, very vulnerable person who then is put at the greatest possible risk. That's not fair to the employee.

1720

Now let me speak about it from the employer's point of view. This bill advances employer interests. We've heard from the official opposition that the employer is placed at a disadvantage because the employer is going to have to make these extra payments to WSIB. But the majority of employers are playing by the rules. The pressure they find themselves under is that they're bidding on a job site; they want to get job X, a small construction project. Those employers are playing by the rules. They're treating their employees as employees, not independent contractors. They're not misclassifying them. They're making the WSIB payments. They're bidding on a job. They're at a competitive disadvantage because they've got an extra cost factor built into their proposal, their bid to get the contract. They're competing against employers who are not playing by the rules, who have artificially created a financial advantage to them-

selves on the backs of the employees, often the backs of the most vulnerable employees.

So now we have two unfairnesses: unfairness to the vulnerable employee and unfairness to the employer who is playing by the rules. That's not fair. Everybody should be treated the same in this. So in many ways, if this bill goes through, we're eliminating that unfair competitive advantage that an employer who's not playing by the rules has over an employer who's playing by the rules.

Employee stakeholders and employer stakeholders, when they listen to this argument that I have just made, accept that this bill is a good thing. Here are some employer quotes of support.

This is from Doug Chalmers, the director of Aluma Systems, Sarnia, past chair of the Sarnia Construction Association: "Congratulations! Absolutely brilliant. This will make Ontario a safer workplace and improve the quality of life for all of us."

Ian Cunningham, president of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations: "This is a timely issue as the construction industry is actively seeking to proactively improve workplace safety across the industry and address the often thorny issue of coverage for independent contractors."

Andrew Sefton, executive director of the Ontario Painting Contractors Association: "Not only has the recent announcement shown that the Ministry of Labour supports the most economical insurance option available for the construction industry, the Ministry of Labour has embraced the notion that the construction industry should aspire to the highest common denominator from which all society shall benefit"—that is, the employer and the employee.

This quote is from Derek Smith of the London and District Construction Association: "This legislation will provide for accountability from operators that may not currently be participating in WSIB, what's more, an initiative such as this will result in levelling the market opportunities for our members as a whole." He's referring to members of the construction association.

Those are employers who are supporting this legislation for all the right reasons.

It has wide support in the labour community. I am quoting Carmen Principato, business manager, Labourers' International: "I am certain that once passed this legislation will assist us in our goals of making Ontario's workplaces the safest..."

There are several other quotes from the employee side of the equation here.

In short, this legislation should move forward now, not wait months and months. The legislation, if passed, will be implemented in about a year. If there's some tweaking that has to be done in the regulations or something, that's where we'll do that, but this is essentially about fairness: fairness for the employees, fairness for the employers, fairness for the public and especially fairness for the vulnerable.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 119. On October 28, the McGuinty government introduced Bill 119, which extends WSIB coverage to thousands more employees in the construction industry.

The key sector targeted by the Liberal government is small construction business. Why is this bad for small business? Small construction businesses cannot afford a new tax, estimated by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, CFIB, to be an average of \$11,000 annually. The new taxes will put many of these businesses at risk and may drive some out of business.

The government keeps on trying to suggest that the debate is about the importance of workplace safety and the danger of fraud. That couldn't be further from the truth. Many small and medium construction businesses already have private insurance which in many cases offers great coverage than the WSIB for about a third of the cost. Even worse, this bill comes at a time when the province is slipping into recession and businesses are looking at how to survive, not how to deal with higher costs of doing business. The fact that Ontario is now officially a have-not province is again further evidence of this.

Given the fact that this resolution today is asking the government to extend public hearings, I thought that it was an important opportunity—a very limited one—to give the government a sense of the kind of difficulty that people in my riding are having at the prospect of this initiative of Bill 119. I quote from Rob Rymell:

"As a single employee in a consulting business in the construction industry, this is very concerning.

"The marketplace is already very competitive and rife with extreme expenses ... which can be in the tens of thousands per year.

"Any additional costs for individuals such as myself will create yet another burden and barrier to growth. In a province where growth is a priority, this is contradictory.

"I understand the need to provide coverage for workers where injury is a real possibility; however, for professionals such as myself who are just making ends meet, this is not justified and in the end will hurt all similar small businesses and stop that needed growth."

Mike Foley of Foley Restoration in Schomberg:

"As a business owner in the construction field in Ontario, I am quite concerned with the government considering mandating owners to be covered by WSIB.

"I presently have liability insurance on my myself, which is better coverage for a lower price than WSIB can offer.

"As such, why on earth would I want to pay more money for less coverage?

"I understand why WSIB wants to have all business owners covered; it is simply to increase the amount of money that flows into their organization.

"Being a business owner in our economy as it is, I think that we as individuals know how to take care of ourselves and our well-being better than WSIB.

"I feel that this should not be mandatory, but rather optional.

"If a business owner feels that WSIB is the coverage that they want, then they can opt to take the coverage and pay the premiums.

"Let me as a business owner decide what is best for me and my family.

"I also feel that if this bill passes, you will see more small business owners close their doors due to the increased costs.

"This in turn will have a more negative impact on our economy than forcing owners to take on this additional coverage."

These are real people—real people trying to make a living, real people obeying the law, doing the best for themselves and their community. What this bill does is put that process and those people and their families and communities in jeopardy.

1730

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I want to just briefly intervene on the side of some sense here. We hear the opposition talking about time allocation and how the debate is being cut off very, very early. But for some of us who have been in this place for more than a few terms, we are finding it rather strange that the Progressive Conservative Party could even keep a straight face when they talked about time allocation motions. During their period in government—that dark period—they managed to, on a regular basis, in every session, bring forward time allocation motions as if it were the only way to pass legislation.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Say it isn't so. What did they do? How many times?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: That's a good question the member from Peterborough raises, the question of how many times the Conservative government of Mike Harris and Ernie Eves cut off debate, used time allocation motions because the opposition was, in their view, asking for debate. Do you know how many times? Sixty-seven times. There's the answer. Our friends in the New Democratic Party managed to do this far less frequently during their five years—I think it was 24 times—but they managed not to sit one complete year. They didn't think 1995 existed, and so Parliament did not debate anything during that period of time.

No one in this place likes time allocation motions, least of all myself or my colleagues, but when met with the kind of opposition that we're getting today, I think most of us would think that it's time to move on.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to speak for a couple of minutes on this debate. I do have a late show after the vote which I will use as well, and I know the member from Renfrew would like to speak to the bill.

I would like to use the couple of minutes that I have left to thank the Muskoka Builders' Association, who have been here for the day in the gallery to watch the proceedings; I thank them for taking the time to come

down. They all run their own businesses, and to take a day away from work costs them money. It just shows how concerned they are with this bill, and I would ask the minister, who is in the House at this time, to make sure they respond to the many questions the Muskoka builders have asked him in a letter to the minister. I was hoping to get their whole letter on the record.

I would just comment that one of the members from the Muskoka Builders' Association handed me a hand-written sheet of paper asking, "If you're not going to implement a bill with so few specifics for three years, why are you in such a hurry to pass this bill? Why are you not allowing the majority of stakeholders in construction to understand the details of the bill and to discuss the details of the bill?"

That's really all the resolution this afternoon is about. Often, opposition day motions are not very reasonable. This is one that's pretty reasonable. All it's asking is to extend public hearings on the bill to communities across the province, because most businesses are totally unaware of this. They don't know this is going on, and that's your plan. You're trying to get it through before they know anything about it.

What else does this motion ask? It asks that all members be allowed to speak to the bill. That's a pretty reasonable opposition day motion, and I would ask the government members to support this motion.

I'll have an opportunity to raise more concerns in my late show, but thank you again to the Muskoka builders for coming down today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: It's been interesting hearing all the members speak on this proposed piece of legislation and the importance of it to the construction sector. I say to all those watching and listening that this bill is solely for the construction sector. I know some have talked about other sectors. It is for the construction sector because of the unique characteristics that exist within the construction sector. It's for the health and safety of those who work in construction, and it's for fairness for those companies that are part of that very, very important sector in Ontario. It is something that we believe in; we believe in construction. That's why the McGuinty government is investing over \$30 billion in infrastructure. Those are those roads and hospitals and schools and community centres that make our communities the places they are. Homebuilders want to build in those communities that have access, that have public transit, that have infrastructure.

If we are going to invest \$30 billion in infrastructure, we're going to want to make sure that those who are building it are taken care of, that their safety is ensured. That's why we can't have construction workers out there in a very high-risk environment where at times they are putting their lives on the line—we want to make sure that if they are to get injured, they will be covered, they will have benefits.

The WSIB is the best system in place to take care of those construction workers. I was talking to a lawyer,

actually, on the weekend, and he was telling me that somebody had come to his office about 10 years ago, and this person had said, "You know, I need your help. I'm in construction. Someone told me, 'Don't get workmen's comp; don't get WSIB. Go to private insurance.' I did. I got some private insurance. I got two years' worth of coverage. I didn't think anything was going to happen to me, so I wanted to go with as low a rate as possible. I didn't want to pay much out." Well, this person wrenched his leg—he was a bricklayer—and now he's trying to find a way to sue some of the people who had given him advice to go the private route. This lawyer friend said, "Why didn't you get workmen's comp?" He said, "Well, you know what? I didn't want to spend the money," etc, and this person finds himself in a very tragic situation. We want to make sure that doesn't happen with others. We want to make sure that all those working in construction, all those independent operators, are covered. This is about their safety, their well-being.

I want to share with you another story, and this is a serious one. Every year there are examples of very serious injuries in construction, as those who are in the gallery and watching on TV would know. Sometimes there are fatalities that have caused additional financial and emotional hardship to families. Following a serious workplace incident where the self-employed worker dies without WSIB coverage, here's what happens. One example that comes to mind—

Mr. Peter Kormos: What do you mean, "comes to mind"? You're reading it off a note.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: —is a construction worker who left behind a spouse and children. He died from a fall but did not have the optional WSIB coverage or insurance. That means his spouse and children were not entitled to the lump-sum benefits and the reimbursement for burial expenses they would have received from the WSIB during that very difficult time. Also, the spouse and young children have not received the monthly benefits they would have been entitled to or some of the additional programs the WSIB offers, such as bereavement counselling and labour market re-entry services for the spouse. In addition, had this worker been covered under the WSIA, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, compensation for the children would be included in the monthly benefits. These benefits continue until the children have completed their education, including post-secondary.

Can you imagine what a different life it would be for that family, and now the hardship that they have to endure, not just the loss of the spouse but the financial hardship that they are going to have to go through? We want to make sure that we're—I'm not reading these stories here. We want to make sure that these construction workers and their families have benefits in place and are taken care of.

1740

Also, within the WSIB there are the health and safety associations which provide best practices and help businesses. I believe that when you look at health and safety and you invest in health and safety and you're

proactive about it within your organization, you're the type of organization that workers want to stay with. They want to be with you. Those are the types of businesses that we want to grow in Ontario. Businesses that are on a level playing field are out there. Yes, they have to make a profit, they have to be viable, but they're going to be most viable if everybody is on that level playing field, if everybody is paying into WSIB.

For too long, these nefarious practices have taken place where some businesses, these poor operators, as we've heard here in the Legislature many a time, have asked individuals who have worked with them, maybe even for years, to declare themselves as independent operators, which we know they're not, so that they don't have to pay the premiums and have a way to undercut when they're trying to get a contract. This is unfair to those workers. This is unfair to those businesses that they're competing against.

The principle of fairness is one that I believe all members in this chamber believe in. It's a value that we cherish, that we hold, that we must do the utmost to protect. I would hope that the members opposite would see that in this light.

This piece of legislation has actually been consulted on, in terms of mandatory coverage, for over 15 years. In 2006 we did have a consultation, and in that consultation we had almost 400 deputations, people coming forward, stakeholders coming forward, explaining why this was important.

I thought that even the leader of the official opposition, John Tory, had gotten it, because just this past spring, in March, he went out to the Interior Systems Contractors Association of Ontario, met with them, and assured the construction industry that he understood the WSIB's reform was essential to the health of the construction industry. Actually, I'll tell you, they were very disappointed in John. They call him "John." They don't call him "Mr. Tory" or the leader of the official opposition. They know him on a first-name basis. He had been there. They said:

"Hi John,

"I am very disappointed that today you released a press release urging the Minister of Labour to repeal Bill 119.

"As you know, you visited our association in March, at which time we raised the issue of mandatory coverage, and you assured our members that you agreed with our position that WSIB reform was essential to the health of the construction industry in Ontario"—big flip-flop here. "At the same time you insisted that a level playing field should be created throughout the bidding process, and that any unfair advantage to the underground economy should be eliminated."

Mr. Norm Miller: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The minister knows he's using that quote out of context.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It's not a point of order.

Minister.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: He said to John, "You have now completely reversed this position, which is unacceptable.

Our members feel that you have neglected to fully honour your commitment and they are questioning their support of your party. It is our fear that your objectivity has been clouded by" some differing groups that are out there.

This speaks volumes. I know that the leader of the official opposition has lost his way. I don't know where he is, but he has lost his way.

What I can tell you is that we on this side of the House want—and I thank the NDP for their support on this—

Mr. Mario Sergio: We want fairness.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: We want fairness, yes. We want stability. We want to make sure that there are safe work conditions and that all those in the construction sector are covered. This is what is important.

There has been a lot of consultation. We will look at what has come from the standing committee and see how we can strengthen the legislation. We will continue to work with stakeholders, reach out to stakeholders and make sure that we can safeguard our workers the best possible.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's my pleasure to put in the last couple of minutes on behalf of the official opposition and the leader of the official opposition, Bob Runciman.

Over and over again we have asked the Minister of Labour to tell us how this bill was going to improve health and safety for workers. He has been unable to or has refused to answer that question. Over and over again he's been asked how this is going to eliminate or reduce the underground economy. He has refused or has been unable to answer that question, because that is not the intent of this bill. This bill is intended to satisfy those people who have been so good to the Liberal Party in the past.

The crux of the matter—and the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka has touched on that—if this bill is so important to you, even though it is doing grave harm to people in the construction business and other trades, then why are you not implementing it until 2012? You are not implementing this until 2012. What is the hurry? There is ample time for many, many more hearings than a few days down here in Queen's Park, where you just brought in your union friends to the hearings. There's ample time to travel throughout the province, get people from all corners of the province to speak on this, give all members of the Legislature an opportunity to speak to this bill. What is the hurry?

The hurry is that you made a deal that you're going to have this bill passed before Christmas; yet you're not implementing it until 2012. What sense does that make? There's no need. There's no requirement. This is, in the most egregious way, an insult to the process in this House: a bill that does not become law until 2012 but has to be rammed through this Legislature in a holus-bolus way with no regard to the members of this House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: First of all, to all the men and women who work in construction, who have worked in construction, who do such fabulous work throughout the province of Ontario, we say thank you. For almost a century, this province has stood with all political parties and said that we should make sure that workers in construction are insured, and that's why we have the WSIB system today.

There are three main reasons for ensuring that this legislation proceeds. First, we want to make sure that every business can compete fairly. Those who are paying premiums and the workers of those businesses who are paying the taxes should not be put at a competitive disadvantage by others who found a shortcut through the system. It eliminates business competitiveness.

Secondly, this is the tip of the underground economy. It's estimated the Ontario government loses up to \$400 million a year because people are not paying all their taxes. Sounds easy, straight cheque. But what would the people of Ontario do with \$400 million every single year?

Third, health and safety: At the end of the day, people who start work in the morning, or whenever they start it, should come home safely in the evening. The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board and the system surrounding it help ensure that. We need to support this legislation, support the men and women—employer, employee, workers—who are in this system. We need to pass this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Runciman has moved opposition day number 5. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay".

In my opinion, the nays have it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We will call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1749 to 1759.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those in favour, please stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Hudak, Tim
Jones, Sylvia
MacLeod, Lisa

Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Norm
Munro, Julia
O'Toole, John
Runciman, Robert W.
Savoline, Joyce

Scott, Laurie
Sterling, Norman W.
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth
Yakabuski, John

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those opposed, please stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher

Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Hoy, Pat

Moridi, Reza
Oraziotti, David
Phillips, Gerry
Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Ruprecht, Tony

Best, Margaret
Bradley, James J.
Brotten, Laurel C.
Brown, Michael A.
Caplan, David
Carroll, Aileen
Colle, Mike
Craitor, Kim

Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Kular, Kuldeep
Leal, Jeff
Mangat, Amrit
Matthews, Deborah
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol

Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Sousa, Charles
Takhar, Harinder S.
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
The ayes are 17; the nays are 40.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

SMALL BUSINESS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We have a late show this evening standing in the name of Mr. Miller, addressed to the Minister of Labour. So I would ask the members for leave quietly so that we can continue.

The member for Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: Two weeks ago, I asked the Minister of Labour during oral questions in this House a serious question posed by a small business owner. He asked if you would extend public hearings on the bill to communities across the province. Specifically, the question I asked, just to refresh your memories, “Minister, will you do what my constituent is asking for and extend public hearings on the bill to communities across the province?” You didn’t even attempt to answer that question. Frankly, your answer was appalling in that it showed a complete lack of respect for the small business owner.

During the supplementary question, I asked a question posed by yet another small business owner who was looking for some assurance from you that your government would not be extending mandatory WSIB coverage to all sectors. Specifically, I asked, “Will you listen to this constituent’s concerns and give your solemn promise not to extend mandatory WSIB coverage to other sectors?” Once again, Minister, you didn’t even attempt to answer the question, and I found your answer showed a complete lack of understanding for the business community. That’s why I filed for this late show, to give you another chance to actually answer the question, not just go on with your quote you had from some e-mail about something John Tory said before this bill was introduced. Please save us that response this time. Try to actually answer the question.

Small business is worried—with good cause. That’s why 30 business owners from Parry Sound—Muskoka have been here the whole day—and they’re still here—taking time off their business, taking time out from work to be here, to show their opposition to this bill being rushed through the Legislature.

I’d like to get on the record some other concerns I’ve received from other businesses in Parry Sound—Muskoka. A Parry Sound business writes, “This is nothing but another tax grab. Mandatory WSIB coverage for a small business would cost us thousands of dollars a year, which would be very harmful to our business. We have been in business for over 30 years and each year it is harder and harder to stay profitable due to government requirements and legislation. Please continue to fight hard to stop this legislation from taking effect.”

Another businessman writes: “I would like to stress to you how concerned I am about the proposed changes to WSIB coverage being forced on small business owners. As you may recall, I am self-employed in a fibreglass repair company. Our business is already under serious financial difficulties due to several factors that are also affecting most businesses these days. My customers are cutting back on their spending and unfortunately being in an industry that deals with recreation, we are the first to bear the brunt of such cutbacks.

“I fear that any further expenses put on businesses like ours will only push us closer to the edge. This is quite simply a tax we cannot afford. I trust you will do everything in your power to stop these changes from being forced on us.”

A Bracebridge business owner writes: “It is concerning to hear that the Liberal government would like to push this legislation through without first allowing committee hearings throughout the province to take place and to consider other options to mandatory coverage by WSIB.

“This will not be any benefit to small business, but will only benefit large unions. Even though we are not part of the construction trade it is worrisome that my exemption status as an executive officer of a corporation could change in the future if this legislation is pushed through.”

Another business writes: “We are a small family construction business that is paying a large amount of WSIB already. One of the main issues that we have with WSIB is that the rate that we have to pay for the people in the office is the same rate as the people in the field. The degree of injury and possibility of injury is far greater in the field.”

I can see that I’m running out of time, and I have more quotes, but I would like to get on the record the Muskoka Builders’ Association president, Dave Nodwell, who’s still here today: “As a construction-related association, we place health and safety as a top priority. We are also concerned with the prevalence of the underground economy. That said, after studying the bill, we don’t see how either of these concerns will be addressed.... We urge you to make any action necessary to require the committee responsible for this bill to hold Ontario-wide consultations with stakeholders prior to passage.”

Minister, these are real concerns from people who drive our economy. Don’t they deserve a chance to be heard? You’ve moved this bill through the House in record time. There are business owners out there who

still don't know what's going on. They don't have any idea that this bill is being debated. Why won't you show these business owners the respect they deserve? At least give them the chance to be heard.

To refresh your memory on my question of two weeks ago, will you extend public hearings? Will you assure owners who are not in the construction sector that they will not be the next industries to be covered by this WSIB legislation? Thank you.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I can say to the member is that we can agree that construction workers are hard-working individuals in a very risky business. I have many in my family and many friends who are carpenters, pipefitters, electricians, who work in roofing, and I want to make sure that they're safe. I want to make sure they're insured for their benefit and for the benefit of their families.

To those who are here from the member's constituency who work in construction, I understand how hard you work, and I understand that you work on some very risky job sites. I commend you for taking on best practices when it comes to health and safety. This is a piece of legislation that is being brought forward for the construction industry because of the unique characteristics that exist within that industry. We want to make sure that all those working in that field are safe, and this will go a long way to doing that. So today, where you have a lot of independent operators who are being misclassified, you have companies that may have 10 employees but are saying that they have five out there, and they're not insuring the other five, and using different loopholes to be able to undermine the system and, yes, create revenue leakage with the WSIB. I think this is unfair. It's unfair to those who are paying their fair share. What I can say to the member is that today, and if this legislation is to be passed, we want to make sure that the enforcement is out there to clamp down on those poor operators, those who are not paying their fair share. We want to make sure that they're paying their premiums because it's only fair to everybody.

In construction, it is a big family. If you meet those who work in the field, they come together. They understand that they toil in the same industry. They build our

communities, our schools, our homes, our community centres, our hospitals, all the things we need and that make up our community.

What I can say to the member is that we will continue to reach out to stakeholders. There have been over 15 years of consultation on mandatory coverage—over 15 years. In 2006, we received almost 400 deputations from all groups—from labour, employers, employees—sharing their stories on how they feel we should move forward. We've taken all that into account. What we want to do is make sure that we shut down these nefarious practices that are taking place out in the field. There are some poor operators who are undercutting business, and we feel that should not be happening. We want a fair, level playing field and that the safety of all construction workers should be taken into account. With WSIB coverage, if a worker were to get injured, they are covered up to 85% of what they would earn over a 12-month period to age 65. This is about the best coverage you can get out there. We support those workers.

They also have labour market re-entry programs to help workers. If somebody has been injured and maybe can't use their arm or can't do exactly what they were doing before working in the construction sector, we can bring them in, retrain them, help them so they can get back into a job. We know you want to keep working, and you would love to keep working within the field that you were working in because that helps with your self-esteem.

The companies that are the good players out there understand the importance of the WSIB coverage. They understand the importance of taking care of their employees, and we want to back them. We want to back them because they are the types of companies that we want here in Ontario. We don't want fly-by-night organizations. We don't want organizations that are not taking care of their most precious resource, and that's their human resource.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. This House is adjourned until 9 of the clock Thursday morning, November 20.

The House adjourned at 1813.

ERRATA

No.	Page	Column	Line(s)	Should read:
89	4015	2	8	Reubin Cipin. He lives at number 2 Neptune in my riding.
89	4015	2	30	Reubin Cipin and all the good folks at number 2 Neptune,

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First Session, 39th Parliament

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Journal des débats (Hansard)

Thursday 20 November 2008

Jeudi 20 novembre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 20 November 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 20 novembre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Is there a quorum present?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Deputy Clerk, is there a quorum present?

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): A quorum is now present.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

COUNTERING DISTRACTED DRIVING AND PROMOTING GREEN TRANSPORTATION ACT, 2008 LOI DE 2008 VISANT À COMBATTRE LA CONDUITE INATTENTIVE ET À PROMOUVOIR LES TRANSPORTS ÉCOLOGIQUES

Mr. Bradley moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 118, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of devices with display screens and hand-held communication and entertainment devices and to amend the Public Vehicles Act with respect to car pool vehicles / Projet de loi 118, Loi modifiant le Code de la route afin d'interdire l'usage d'appareils à écran et d'appareils portatifs de télécommunications et de divertissement et modifiant la Loi sur les véhicules de transport en commun à l'égard des véhicules de covoiturage.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I rise in the House today to begin debate on legislation that, if passed by the Legislature, would make Ontario's roads safer. I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant for transportation, Mike Brown, who will resume debate on this legislation when I have concluded my remarks.

I'm sure there are many of us who have witnessed this while driving: drivers who are sending text messages or chatting on a cellphone as they turn a corner, apparently

oblivious to passengers and pedestrians. I think any one of us can go back in time and think of that happening, where we have been behind the wheel of our own car and watched somebody else busy using a hand-held electronic device and not paying full attention to driving. What was interesting when this bill was introduced, and there was some television, radio and newspaper coverage of it, people in the news business actually knocked on the windows of people who were driving their cars while talking on a cellphone. When they asked them, "Do you think this should be banned?" almost invariably, even though they were doing it, they thought it should.

I can't think of anybody—there may be people out there, and I commend them—who hasn't, at one time or other, decided that that person was going to use the telephone just this time and be distracted driving. I have to confess to being one of those, in years gone by, who have done that. We all know when we do it that it's an unsafe practice and yet we're almost compelled, by the amount of electronic gadgetry that we have available to us today, to respond to that gadgetry in a way that makes us less than safe drivers.

I suspect that, in a lot of situations, drivers simply do not realize that they endanger themselves, their passengers and other road users. But, really, the evidence speaks for itself. Research shows that a driver who uses a hand-held cellphone when behind the wheel is about four times more likely to be in a crash than if they were simply focused on the task of driving. In fact, a recent Transport Canada study found that driver distraction is a contributing factor in about 20% of all collisions on the road.

Our busy lives place great demands on us. We feel pressured to make the most of our time, and that even includes the time we spend behind the wheel of a vehicle. Certainly, new communications technologies have created some tremendous conveniences. Sometimes it becomes just too easy to use this technology any time and, in fact, in any place—except the Legislative Assembly, because if you use it here it gets seized by the Sergeant-at-Arms. So we know that we all come in in terror that at least our telephones are not going to go off in this Legislature; otherwise we have to hand them to the Sergeant-at-Arms, who has a fine collection now, I'm sure, that he keeps at home. So we do it, even when we know it's the wrong place. That's societal, now, because of the amount of technology we have available.

While the temptation to reach for our cellphones or BlackBerries while driving is there, we need to convince Ontario drivers that their full attention should be on the task of driving. This legislation, if passed, will ban text

messaging, e-mailing, dialing and chatting on hand-held cellphones and the use of other hand-held electronic entertainment devices while driving.

I would like to pay tribute, by the way, at this point in time to my colleagues Kevin Flynn, the member for Oakville, and John O'Toole, the member for Durham, both of whom have placed before this House for consideration private members' bills which deal with this matter. This is one example where, in my view, individual members of the Legislature have an influence on public policy. You see, while governments don't always adopt exactly the bill that's put forward, the advantage of it for each one of us as individual members—cabinet ministers are not allowed to present private members' bills, but for those who are, the great advantage is it creates public debate on an issue of this kind.

0910

Often, when the individuals in the Legislature bring forward a piece of legislation, it is debated in the House and it does not make it all the way to fruition—in other words, to a law that is enacted in the province of Ontario. But I don't think we should downgrade that effort on the part of individual members, because they have created a buzz about the issue, if you will, and they've gathered some attention through the media and then through the public and, ultimately, we sometimes see legislation which is passed. So, to my two colleagues I just mentioned and others who have, in this House, spoken about the need for dealing with distracted driving—and there are many pieces on distracted driving; this is one of them—I want to commend each and every one of them; also the opposition critics that we have. The word "critics" is sometimes a harsh word to use because one anticipates that they're always criticizing. In fact, in transportation, I can say that the Conservative and NDP critics often have very constructive ideas to bring forward to the House. They don't simply criticize the government, even though that's their job, and I understand that. I have sat for most of my career on the other side of the House as a member of the opposition, so I understand that the opposition's job is to keep the government on its toes and to criticize when there is a need for criticism. But also, I think in the field of transportation in particular, what I've liked about it since becoming the minister is that there are some good suggestions that come forward that I try to incorporate into legislation, regulations and policy. Not all wisdom in the Legislature resides on the government side and, indeed, not all wisdom in Ontario resides within the walls of the Ontario Legislature. That will shock some members of the Legislature when I say that.

Interjection: Pass that on to the Premier.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I know, and it fits all of us, of course, in this Legislature.

Let me be clear: Ontario is not proposing an all-out ban on these devices. When we did our consultation with the various people who are interested in this issue, particularly those in the police service, they indicated what would be virtually impossible to enforce. We also have,

of course, the opportunity to utilize another bill that was passed here many years ago called the bill that deals with careless driving. So a charge of careless driving can be applied to anybody who is driving in a distracted way. I think where police were probably reluctant to employ that was—careless driving carries some pretty hefty penalties, so there was an inclination to perhaps reprimand the person or, if there were an accident, of course, to charge with careless driving or even dangerous driving. But when we did our consultations, and probably when John O'Toole and Kevin Flynn did their consultations, it was found that the major problem was with hand-held devices that people were manipulating while trying to drive.

We still hope that people are not distracting themselves in other ways. Even talking on the phone while we're driving is a certain distraction. It is not a manual distraction, but to our minds—we are not fully attuned to driving. We wish we could solve all of the world's problems in this Legislature. I assure you we cannot, but we try, from time to time, to do so with the help of the opposition and the good advice of the public.

We are simply asking drivers not to use hand-held wireless communication and electronic entertainment devices while driving. The use of hands-free wireless communications devices, such as an earpiece or Bluetooth set up to work with your cellphone or BlackBerry, will still be allowed. GPS units mounted on a dashboard will still be permitted.

We also are making sure that emergency phone calls to 911 will not be prohibited. Police and emergency personnel rely on calls from the public reporting on accidents or dangerous driving, so those would be permitted. That does not mean we are encouraging the use of hands-free devices. Any activity that divides a driver's attention for even a moment should be avoided whenever possible. And if an emergency call needs to be made, we actually encourage the driver to have a passenger in the vehicle make that call whenever possible or to pull over and make that call.

In the past, our government has taken tough action to ensure that our roads remain among the safest in North America. Let me say this point: I was surprised myself, looking at the statistics, because when you're not the minister or the critic, you don't necessarily look at the details of each ministry. But over the years, while we've had different governments in power, Ontario has developed a very good reputation for safe roads compared to other jurisdictions. We're at a point now, almost year in and year out, where we're first or second—the first in the last figures we had was the Northwest Territories—in all of North America. So we're first or second. That doesn't happen by accident; it means that successive governments and individual members of the Legislature have proposed legislation regulations and policy that ensure that that is the case and that we have appropriate enforcement of those laws as well.

We have passed legislation that deals with drivers who continue to drink and drive. We're soon bringing forward

regulations increasing penalties for drinking drivers who fall within what we call the "warn range." That means having a blood alcohol concentration between .05 and .08.

We have recently introduced legislation that proposes to strengthen the graduated licensing system for novice drivers and to address those who choose to drive while their licence is suspended, and we've delivered the strongest possible message to those who think our roads are meant for street racing.

Again, if I can make reference to a member of the Legislature in this regard, there are many members of the Legislature, both predecessors—Harinder Takhar certainly was very interested in this; and the member for Etobicoke Centre was very interested in this as well. She now has the job of being the Minister of Natural Resources, but she brought forward this legislation. Frank Klees, in opposition, brought forward some good proposals, I thought, when looking at street racing. We have delivered that message to those who think that street racing happens to be okay.

It's now time to take another important step to save lives, prevent injuries and make our communities safer. Anyone who chooses to break this proposed law addressing distracted driving would face a fine of up to \$500. But we don't stop there. We're also proposing to broaden the current ban on televisions that are visible to the driver to include other devices with display screens. This includes devices like portable DVD players. Indeed, they happen to be a distraction if you watch people trying to manipulate them, paying attention to them instead of driving.

Let me be clear that placing restrictions on these devices does not mean that other distractions are not important. Drivers must take care when doing anything that shifts their attention from the task of driving even for an instant. Those of us who drive the highways frequently, particularly to come into Toronto where the Legislature is, recognize very much that just a second can make a difference. How many times have you looked away, one way or another, distracted by perhaps a sound that you heard, and you look back and the vehicle in front of you is very close? So we recognize that with the speeds that are in place on highways and with the speed that cars are going at on the highways, any distraction is a problem.

Drivers who are not focused on the task of driving should not be driving; it's that simple. Those who put others at risk by allowing themselves to become distracted for any reason could be charged with careless driving under the Highway Traffic Act or dangerous driving, which is a criminal offence.

We have to simply stop this danger on our roads. Our message is clear: Eyes on the road and hands on the wheel at all times will help prevent tragedies before they happen. We must continue to ensure that we address new risks and hazards as they arise. As with all of the safety reforms we have introduced, our purpose is clear: It is to preserve and strengthen Ontario's outstanding record of safety on our roads. This proposed legislation supports

the McGuinty government's commitment to prevent injury and reduce traffic collisions.

0920

There's another significant matter in this particular bill, and that is environmentally friendly transportation solutions. It was recently brought to my attention that the current definition of carpooling, under the Public Vehicles Act, has made it difficult for individuals in certain situations to form carpools to go to and from school, social events and even work. That is why we've proposed an amendment to the Public Vehicles Act to make it easier for people to carpool. We are removing the barriers and red tape associated with carpooling in Ontario, in hopes that this will further encourage their use and help remove single-occupant vehicles from Ontario's highways.

One of my colleagues, Gilles Bisson, who represents Timmins—James Bay, brought forward a private member's bill in this regard and has been campaigning for this. I want to say that we thank him for that. Once again, it's a demonstration that all members of this House have concerns about safety, and sometimes they manifest themselves in bills before the Legislature. So Gilles can take pride in being part of this legislation, as he should. He can even include that in his leadership material as he goes about the province campaigning for the leadership of the New Democratic Party. I thought I'd get that in for you, Gilles, for those who may not be aware that you have launched that campaign.

Road safety is one of the government's top priorities. Our goal is to keep Ontario's roads among the safest in North America, and indeed the entire world. This bill will make every Ontarian safer, protect families and keep communities safe. Certainly, I encourage—it says in my notes, "I urge all members to support the bill." I prefer, "I encourage all members to support the bill."

What is helpful as well with legislation is getting some input to the legislation. The public should know as well—I guess members of the Legislature know, but the public often doesn't—that in addition to the legislation, which is a kind of umbrella under which you may pass regulations, there are regulations which are promulgated or put in place. It's also good to consult there. We consult particularly with our safety partners, and we listen to what the public has had to say. Sometimes we don't make the modifications they want, but sometimes we do.

Whenever you're developing a bill of this kind, as well, what happens is that you usually do a pre-consultation. Again, there are people we refer to as safety partners. They're the Ontario Provincial Police, in our case province-wide; local police services across the province; the Ontario Safety League; the Insurance Bureau of Canada; Mothers Against Drunk Driving; the people who run driving schools—in other words, a variety of people we consult before we even develop legislation of this kind. And sometimes we discuss matters of relevance to road safety with individuals as well.

Ultimately, we come forward with a bill—it's not just something that comes out of someone's mind and appears. The bill comes forward and goes through a com-

mittee process in cabinet. At that time, members of cabinet—by the way, Premier McGuinty has made a change that I think will be emulated by governments in other jurisdictions and by any subsequent government there may be in the province under a different Premier; that is, he has encouraged and allowed individual members of the Legislature on the government side who are not part of the cabinet to sit on cabinet committees. I'll tell you that has made a big difference. Their perspective is often different. People who are free from the day-to-day responsibilities that preoccupy people who have ministries are often in a much better position to offer some independent thought on these matters.

So it goes through this process. Legal counsel put it into legalese—into parliamentary language—and we proceed with the legislation. Then we have a debate in the House, and I'm always interested in what members have to say about legislation of this kind. I know that sometimes people think, "What's the use of going through the motions?" I actually find it interesting. I even read Hansard after or, since I'm a night hawk, I watch the replays of the Legislature late at night and see what my friend the member for Thornhill, or any other member of the Legislature, is saying about something in the House. I think that's beneficial.

Often, particularly if the opposition feels there's a need to do so, we go to committee, and our government has pretty consistently gone to committee. There's always a debate about how long and where and so on, and I understand that. I was an opposition House leader and a government House leader, so I know those particular battles. But I find it beneficial, when you're in committee, to hear different delegations that are coming there, to hear what opposition members have to say and the good questions that are asked.

Sometimes the government brings forward amendments based on those kinds of inputs from the public and from all members of the Legislature. And sometimes, although I'm sure this is not as frequent as the opposition would like, we even give a nod of approval to an opposition amendment. But the opposition should know that often it may not appear to be that amendment, but the government may take the amendment and put it in place. I'm sure, as I tell my friend from Halton, that you know how we always give you credit when we take one of the amendments you have and make it a government amendment. We're happy to do that.

So, members of the Legislature, I hope you will give this bill your favourable consideration. It does not have a lot of components to it. There's some subsequent legislation, which has been brought in, that is multifaceted. We've tried to keep this a fairly narrow bill, and I know that in opposition you like that very much; you don't like omnibus bills, and I understand that. I hope you give this some favourable consideration, though I'm never presumptuous enough to believe that it is automatic in this House.

I will now relinquish the floor to my friend from Algoma-Manitoulin, the parliamentary secretary for transportation, Michael Brown.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I would like to thank the minister for his thoughtful presentation as we move forward with this particular bill.

I rise in the House to continue the discussion of this proposed legislation that would help make our province's roads safer by reducing distractions for drivers.

Over the years, Ontario has earned the reputation for having among the safest roads in North America. This is a record we have maintained for over a decade, and to keep Ontario at the forefront of road safety, our government is always looking for new ways to deal with new challenges we face in today's ever-changing driving environment.

Today, Ontario faces a global road safety issue, one that many provinces, states and countries are beginning to recognize as an emerging danger on our roads. With the number of cellphone users on the rise and new types of wireless communication technologies on the market almost every day, we know that the time to act is now. Now is the time to deal with this issue before it gets out of hand. Now is the time to remind drivers to keep their eyes on the road and their hands on the wheel.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I've given every consideration in this matter, but it's way too low. A quorum call, please. This is pretty bad.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Do we have a quorum?

The Acting Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Trevor Day): A quorum is not present.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Acting Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Trevor Day): A quorum is now present.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): A quorum being now present, the honourable member for Algoma-Manitoulin has the floor.

0930

Mr. Michael A. Brown: As I was saying, with the number of cellphone users on the rise and new types of wireless communications technologies on the market almost every day, we know that the time to act is now. Now is the time to deal with this issue, before it gets out of hand. Now is the time to remind drivers to keep their eyes on the road and their hands on the wheel.

As Minister Bradley had pointed out earlier, the evidence really does speak for itself. Research shows that drivers using hand-held electronic devices are about four times more likely to be in a crash than drivers who are focused on the road. Let me repeat that: Research shows that drivers using hand-held electronic devices are about four times more likely to be in a crash than drivers who are focused on the road. Our proposed legislation will help improve driver behaviour and save lives.

We are not alone in our thinking, here. We have the support of many organizations, who agree that now is the time to put a stop to distracted drivers who continue to text, e-mail and chat on their cellphones and BlackBerry devices or focus on their hand-held wireless entertainment devices while driving.

If this legislation is passed, Ontario will join more than 50 jurisdictions worldwide that already have laws in place to deal with this type of driver distraction.

In October, when we announced our plans to move forward with this proposed legislation, a number of our road safety partners stood beside us to lend their support, including the Insurance Bureau of Canada, the Canadian Automobile Association, the Ontario Provincial Police, the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, and the Ontario Safety League, just to name a few.

I would like to take this opportunity to share with the members some of the supportive words we received from those organizations on that day. Deputy Commissioner Larry Beechy, speaking on behalf of the Ontario Provincial Police, noted that the legislation will help get the message to Ontarians that, "Driving is not a part-time job, it is a full-time job ... that it requires every one of our faculties to operate your motor vehicle." He sees this legislation as being a great tool for law enforcement officers across the province.

Dr. Suzanne Strasberg, president-elect of the Ontario Medical Association—and a family doctor—emphasized the importance of this legislation in preventing injuries by changing driver behaviour. "Every day," says Dr. Strasberg, "we see victims of road collisions, whether it be trauma in the emergency room or ongoing treatment of injuries in the clinical setting.... Not only will this ban address the dangers caused by drivers distracted by their cellphones, BlackBerries and other hand-held devices, but it has begun a dialogue among the people of Ontario."

It is true that this legislation has gotten a lot of people thinking. More importantly, however, it's gotten a lot of people thinking about their own driving behaviour and the potential life-altering consequences of a moment's inattention at the wheel.

Changing driver behaviour is an enormous task that cannot be accomplished overnight. But, with the help of our police, our safety partners and the people of Ontario, we know that this legislation could make our roads safer places for everyone. Together we can and we will do more to save lives and prevent injuries to keep our communities safe. Our "eyes on the road, hands on the wheel" approach will actively prevent tragedies before they happen. It is time for our government to make the call and end this type of distracted driving. I urge all members to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I'm going to get a chance a little bit later—probably not today but on future days—to comment on the points made by the minister and the parliamentary assistant.

I would say that, yes, this is certainly legislation that has been long sought after by many members of this House. This is an issue that a lot of us have paid attention to in regard to the dangers of the use of telephones, BlackBerries and other devices while driving.

However, as always, I think this bill is going to have to go to committee. There are some issues that I know I'm being contacted on. I'm sure the minister is being lobbied, as well as the parliamentary assistant. For example, the people in the courier industry: One of the issues raised to me is that the courier industry is an essential part of allowing commerce to operate in the province of Ontario. They use portable, hand-held devices that are push-to-talk-type radios in order to be dispatched to pick up a parcel at one end of Yonge Street and bring it somewhere down at the other end of Yonge Street. They use this type of technology, which could end up being banned under this legislation. We're going to have to take a look at making sure we don't bite off our nose to spite our face when it comes to banning devices. We can't be banning devices that are currently being used by commerce and by others that are basically aids to the work they do. I'm sure there are ways around regulations; we can figure that out.

The other issue was the device they have which is like a tablet, which basically shows where they pick up deliveries, where they bring the deliveries to. The driver needs to glance over at that to find out, "Where am I going next?" That industry is indicated, by stats, as a fairly safe industry; they have far fewer accidents per capita than most others. What I would say is that this bill has to go to committee to address some of those concerns.

Is the bill a step in the right direction? I'm sure my colleague the member from Hamilton Centre will say, "Yes, indeed." But as always, I think we need to do due diligence and give people an opportunity to come before us at committee in order to speak to the issues that need to be fixed, to make sure we don't throw the baby out with the bathwater in this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: This is an interesting piece of legislation. You could say it's another ban. That brings, I believe, the number to 29 or 30 bans this government has introduced; not all have passed, but they have introduced 30 bans. It's a very Liberal approach: "This is the way we think your life should be run; therefore, we're going to ban all of those that we don't agree with." That's obviously the Liberal way.

I was pleased to hear the minister talk about his looking forward to amendments from the opposition and how they would be duly considered and some might even be passed and looked at seriously. I was pleased to hear the minister say that, because the experience of this government has been that there are precious few amendments that have ever been accepted from the opposition.

One of the problems in this bill is that I'm not sure how serious the government is about it, because there are no demerit points associated with convictions. If there are no demerit points associated with a conviction, basically it becomes: "Pay the fine, and keep on driving. We need the money." This is a cash grab; it's like photo radar. It doesn't do anything to get bad drivers off the road. Bad drivers keep driving. They don't accumulate demerit

points and therefore lose their licences. They don't accumulate demerit points and pay higher insurance costs. They just pay their fine and keep on driving, and the government is happy to receive that money and to let the highways remain in their unsafe conditions with these drivers on them. So I would say if the government is serious about this, one of the amendments should be that they would add demerit points, two or three demerit points, to this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions or comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: It is a pleasure for me to take a couple of moments this morning to talk about Bill 118. Really, this is an interesting piece of legislation. My good friend the member from Durham, I believe on at least three occasions, has brought forward private member's legislation to ban the use of cellphones, which is part of this bill. I think a member from the third party has also brought forward a private member's bill that targeted the same thing. There's no question: When I talked to the police chief in the city of Peterborough, my good friend Murray Rodd, and the detachment commander for the local OPP, Mike Johnston, they certainly expressed to me on numerous occasions the need to do things to improve highway safety in the province of Ontario. One of the areas they've clearly identified is the issue of drivers being distracted while they are driving, involved in a number of things; one of them, of course, is using cellphones. So there's no question that this bill uncovers a number of issues. Certainly, the Canadian Automobile Association, which if you are a member you receive on a monthly basis, often spends some time in its publications to clearly identify issues that need to be addressed in terms of road safety and making sure that people operating motor vehicles are not distracted. Bill 118 goes a long way to bring in legislation that prohibits a number of those things that we're all tempted to do from time to time while we are driving—to be distracted while we are driving. Bill 118, along with other measures brought forward by the Minister of Transportation, is all intended to keep Ontario roads safe.

0940

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions or comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I think it's sad that the Conservatives are opposing this initiative. I heard the member stand up and say he's against banning this. The thing is that there's a role for government to play when the health and security of our citizens are at risk. This has nothing to do with ideology; this has to do with safety. Those of us who have heard the stories—I know that a friend of mine who certainly changed my mind on this issue was saying that one of his nieces was in a very serious car accident because she reached down to pick up her ringing cellphone, which was down in her purse, as she was driving. The phone was ringing, and as she reached down to pick up that purse she got into a horrendous accident.

If it could help educate people, especially our young people, about not using these hand-held devices in cars,

we will be doing something to prevent these avoidable accidents; not all of them, but at least to educate all of us, whether we're texting or whether we're answering or picking up cellphones. I think most reasonable people feel that this is the proper thing for a government to do, because most people, I think, support this initiative. If you ask most of my constituents, they think it's a reasonable safety initiative. To frame this as ideological is typical of the knee-jerk, neo-con approach which has destroyed the American economy, where they stand back and become spectators as things fall apart. At least we're trying to do something to protect public safety on our roads.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The minister or the parliamentary assistant has up to two minutes to respond.

Hon. James J. Bradley: First, to the critic for the NDP, Gilles Bisson: I think he makes a good point when he says that you want to hear from those who may be quibbling with certain parts of it. We want to hear from them. Also, when we're developing the regulations which will be very specific, if there are exemptions that are required, we can look at that at that time; but I think he makes a good point.

To the Progressive Conservative Party: when you say "Progressive Conservative"—I just saw my friend from Halton give a good example of the progressive and conservative, because on one hand he was complaining that we're even bring forward this legislation. That was his conservative side saying that because it's banning something else. On the other side, he said the bill should be tougher. It should have demerit points. That was the other side of the issue. So I love seeing the Progressive Conservatives back in the House, as opposed to just the Conservatives before.

About the cash grab: The provincial government doesn't get this money; the municipalities get this money. We know municipalities are eager to acquire additional cash to meet their very real requirements, so the provincial government does not receive the funding from any of the fines.

In addition to that, I must say to my friend from Halton, we looked very carefully at demerit points. One of the consultations we had was with the police services. As much as possible, you don't want them having to go to court every time you turn around. They do if it's careless driving or dangerous driving. They do with a lot of the laws they must enforce. One of the thoughts that was expressed to us was that a fine was certainly in order. A lot of education was necessary. I think John O'Toole said that when he was bringing forward his legislation, but that if you had demerit points you're going to have people constantly going to court over these issues and tying up the courts and the police officers even more. So that was the reason we chose that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I understand that we have pre-arranged for unanimous consent to defer our critic the member for Newmarket–Aurora's leadoff on this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Well, do we have—take your seat, please. I say to the member, take your seat. Do we have unanimous consent to defer the PCs' leadoff? Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you for the begrudging granting of unanimous consent, to all members.

A funny thing happened to me on the way to the Legislature this morning. A couple of things popped into my head. I am known in this Legislature for a bass baritone voice. Unfortunately, it does not extend to singing, so I'll say these words, which come from a 1960s song:

Keep your mind on your driving,
Keep your hands on the wheel,
Keep your snoopy eyes on the road ahead.
We're having fun sitting in the back seat,
Kissin' and a-huggin' with Fred.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I remember that song.

Mr. Peter Shurman: You remember that song?

That was the distraction of the 1960s. The more things change, the more they remain the same.

The other thing that happened is that I decided, in the very brief drive from Avenue Road and St. Clair, which is the approximate area in which I live—it takes about seven minutes to get to Queen's Park—I would keep my eyes somewhere else and look at what was going on in other cars. I don't see many cars on that drive, but I noticed two people drinking coffee, which is in and of itself a distraction. One of them had snow all over his windows, another distraction. Two people were on hand-held cellphones, which is one of the main things we seek to regulate through this bill. Another person was using an earpiece that fully covered his ears, not one of those little plug-ins, so I wonder what his hearing would have been like had somebody yelled to him, much less honked a horn. One lady was applying makeup as she drove.

When we speak about Bill 118, which is entitled, Countering Distracted Driving and Promoting Green Transportation Act, 2008, the thought is that it could cover a myriad of things. Although people out there, whether they be individuals who confront us as members of provincial Parliament or talk radio hosts, or whoever is discussing this, like to call it the "cellphone ban bill," it's not just a cellphone ban bill.

The other thing that came to mind was a line that was uttered by the Premier this week in this Legislature on another subject: "Who says you can't be effective in opposition?" I think, in this particular case, there is a lot to be said for being in opposition, because I want to take this opportunity to congratulate my colleague from Durham for introducing no less than six private members' bills that aimed at prohibiting the use of hand-held cellphones while driving. He has tried to do that since the late 1990s, and I appreciate the fact that this has been basically universally recognized in this House. It only goes to show that it takes some time to talk sense into some of the prominent members in Premier McGuinty's government who very publicly in the past have stated their opposition to these initiatives.

I will quote from Hansard as I go on. This only goes to show that perseverance does indeed pay off. My colleagues and I on this side of the House are in cautious support of this legislation, and I want to make that clear. There is a lot that has to happen before we get there—but cautious support. I say "cautious" because we think that this government has to take a tougher stand on unsafe driving; "cautious" also because we are aware of this government's unnatural need to over-regulate anything they get their hands on; and because this bill does not emphasize cellphones or other hand-held devices and, basically, as it stands, has an unlimited scope.

Members of this House who have paid any attention to me whatsoever know that I have a particular aspect of my character that reacts negatively when we talk about bans for the sake of bans. Having said that, I really like legislation that protects the proverbial "you from me and me from you." I think that, if we work it right, this bill can fall under that category. This is the slippery slope, especially with the nanny-statist McGuinty government we have which, if left to its own devices, would start regulating CDs, radios, earpieces and other non-hand-held devices, and that can be done in regulation, so we'll get on to the question of hearings shortly, but we definitely need them.

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It's common sense that any television, computer or other device that has a display screen, other than GPS or similar aids, should not be used by a driver while a vehicle is in motion. If you do use a GPS device, and I do, it talks to you. You program it before you start moving, and you listen what it says. Goodness knows I spent enough years before they invented those things listening to somebody in the right-hand seat say, "Turn right now." Now we've created the electronic version of it.

I know there is some discussion about the fact that it is the conversation rather than the hand-held cellphone that distracts drivers. This does not mean that you have or should have the right to ban passengers' conversations and singing along with the radio.

I hearken back to approximately 25 years ago, before we had cellphones in automobiles, when if you saw a single individual in an automobile, and his or her mouth was moving, you knew that what was going on was singing with the radio. I see a lot of nods around the Legislature. Now if you see a single person in a car and the mouth is moving, you assume that it's a conversation with somebody using Bluetooth technology, and I assume that very shortly, all automobiles will be equipped with Bluetooth technology working through the sound system, which is the safest form of conversation that you can have.

You can address the use of cellphones and other hand-held electronic devices, but how are you going to ban distractions? Distractions in and of themselves are a part of driving. If you take a defensive driving course—which all of us on all sides of this Legislature certainly condone—at the school level, we talk about teaching defensive driving, and defensive driving is about avoiding

distractions. Distractions can be anything: They can be the sudden change of a light; they can be somebody stepping off the curb. So you have to have to have your eyes out there.

I heard a statistic recently, and I can't attest to its precise veracity, but if you are travelling on the 401 at 110 or 115 kilometres per hour, which is, yes, slightly over the speed limit, but typically the speed of the road, you cover a football field every second. So if you take your eyes off the road for one or two seconds, goodness knows what can happen. Are you going to ban distractions in their entirety? No.

We also have to reassure people out there. The first call that I got in my office was from a person who heard that this legislation was going to be tabled by the minister, and asked, was that going to mean his business was going to go broke because we're not going to be able to communicate in cars whatsoever? I said, "Well, I can't speak to a bill before I've seen it." Now I have. Obviously the bill does not seek to ban the use of communications devices. What it does seek to do is regulate their use. Obviously, as well, there are many businesses that are totally dependent on this kind of dispatch.

Will you ban children on sidewalks, cats crossing the street, playing basketball on a court near a road because of the potential for a distraction? I think not. But let me quote from a 2003 Hansard in debate on one of my colleague from Durham's private member's bills on this subject, and at the time the speaker was the current government House leader, and he said: "I can't support this. I think this government has to work better with the industry to educate people, to ensure that cellphones continue to be a safety device on the streets. If we're going to tackle the distractions, let's tackle the distractions outside the car and the real distractions in the car"—and he was referring to Big Macs, radios, Sony Walkmans and passengers—and let's "not get bogged down with this particular effort." Things seem to have changed on his part and on the part of the government, and frankly that's a fine thing.

While our party supports legislation that makes Ontario's roads safer, we have always emphasized the importance of personal responsibility, enforcement and consequences. A responsible driver gets behind the wheel knowing that there will be distractions on the road that require his or her attention. Education and awareness do play important roles and will have an impact in reducing the number of drivers talking on hand-held cellphones, but you cannot omit enforcement. That point was made by the member from Durham in initially responding to this bill.

Let's deal first with the educational aspect. I fully support educating everyone in Ontario about the dangers of using electronic devices while driving. By the way, I include myself. While I do have Bluetooth technology in the car, and I think it applies to many people in this Legislature, the tendency to hear the sound of one's BlackBerry or feel the vibration of the BlackBerry, knowing that a message is coming in and wondering—

because there's always something urgent to respond to—what that message may be makes me, oftentimes, reach down for that holster, pull out the BlackBerry and, in between driving, look at the screen and see if I can get the general gist of the message. I admit that that's the wrong thing to do, and I keep chastising myself when my wife isn't in the car chastising me on her own.

The worst thing is to try to react and come up with a short text message, and get back with one thumb while you have the other hand on the wheel. That's got to stop. It's got to stop on my part and it's got to stop on the part of everybody who is either a legislator or in business, the people who use these devices, which are, after all, becoming more prolific rather than less prolific. Education is a huge aspect of this bill, and so is moral suasion. So I do support educating all of Ontario's drivers about all of these things. The legislation should include changes to drivers' education in Ontario at the fundamental level.

When I was 16—goodness, 45 years ago—I took a course in defensive driving and we talked about distractions, which included no electronic devices, but they did include things like tuning a radio. Well, it's an electronic device, but it had five buttons at the time and that took you away from the road. If that was the case, then goodness knows what you can do now with the prolific number of devices that have come on the scene. Courses in Ontario need to outline the dangers of using electronic devices while driving. It is my hope that one day, talking on a hand-held cellphone while driving a car will be as incomprehensible as lighting up a cigarette in a hospital.

Interestingly, if you look at bans that protect, as I said before, me from you and you from me, we're talking about things that are comparable to smoking in buildings, which began as a movement rather than as any legislation. Buildings and companies started to say, "If you want to smoke, take it outside." It only later became enshrined in law. Now, if you did it, you'd be besieged by the people who work around you, saying, "You can't do that." I suspect that, much as I describe my own reactions to my own abuse of my BlackBerry and the fact that I have to put it away, the legislation will push me along. We'll get to the question of enforcement momentarily.

Education takes time. We need to start making our roads safer now. You've already wasted years not listening to my colleague from Durham, I say to the government. Now that you've taken a step, albeit a tiny step, in the right direction, let's ensure that this gets done right. Without the ability to enforce, legislation becomes pointless. This bill, as written, does not outline any real and significant consequences for breaking a cellphone ban and it does not outline who is going to do the enforcement or how it will be enforced. Will the enforcement be carried out by police, and if so, how will they carry out this enforcement? What tools will they be provided with to enforce such legislation? Do they even have the resources to do that, between chasing speeding cars, watching out for dangerous drivers and, I might say, checking for adults who might be smoking in cars carrying underage children? You passed, or maybe I should say we

passed, that law in the spring and I commented on it then. Is anyone enforcing it? Anyone? I don't think so. But it's there. The fact that this government's bill didn't provide answers to any of these questions suggests that they have not yet bothered to consult in a meaningful way with anyone affected by this legislation to get those answers.

Would breaking the ban cost a driver demerit points? Not according to this bill, as it stands today. Ontario would be the only jurisdiction that does not have demerit points assessed for breaking this type of law. If this is an illegal and dangerous activity, a distraction resulting in unsafe operation of a vehicle, it is an activity that requires a severe penalty, in my opinion—points, because points translate into something palpable, which is questions, at the very least, being asked by one's insurance company, if not, indeed, seeing one's premiums rise.

What would be the cost of breaking this law? A slap on the wrist? A few bucks? A lot of people—and I've had calls to my office, saying, "I'm prepared to take that risk if that's what it is." So it's not big enough. The question is, is the government really serious about making our roads safer with this bill, or are we again on the receiving end of an off-the-cuff, token bill that creates media buzz, which it surely has, but fails to accomplish an objective? The government is not about public relations. The government of a province, this province, is about people.

1000

I'd like to read another quote, and this comes, again, from 2003 Hansard, in debate on one of the private member's bills from the member from Durham. The quote is from the current Deputy Premier. He said: "It is interesting to me—my father was a trucker—that CB radios weren't outlawed, that there wasn't a prohibition on the use of CB radios over time, because the evidence was so clear that the distraction was causing motor vehicle accidents. We didn't see that because we weren't at that time having an Ontario Legislature, I guess, that sought to find little populist wedge issues."

Let's just try to define here what is a little populist wedge issue. It is your job to consult with the people who are affected by this legislation, which means that everyone with a car should have input on how to make driving safer. We should be hearing from people like the Canadian Automobile Association; we should be hearing from organizations like the Canada Safety Council; and yes, we should be hearing from Joe or Jane Doe who do the driving, whether what they're driving is an 18-wheeler or the family Ford Focus. It doesn't make any difference. The government needs to consult more broadly with stakeholders concerned with public safety as well as others affected. I might make the comment that in a number of cases recently, we have not seen sufficient consultation on the part of this government on legislation that it's putting forward and, very particularly, taking the show on the road so that committees can hear from people who are constrained from travelling to Toronto to make their deputations and need to make them in situ, in the venue where they live. So I'm hoping that when this bill goes to committee we get a chance to do that.

The government does need to consult more broadly with stakeholders concerned with public safety as well as with everyone affected. The police, trucking and transport organizations, logistical stakeholders, must be consulted, and not in a controlled four- or five-hour session. Again, I say, not only in a session held here at the Legislature. Hearings have to be held throughout the province.

This bill talks only about the use of electronic devices while driving on a highway and this is a very important aspect that has to be dealt with. Is the government leaving it up to each driver to decide what is considered a highway and what is considered a city street? The definition has not been made clear. Or is it using the standard definition of highways are roads with speed limits of 80 kilometres per hour or greater? If so, does that mean that when driving down a busy city street, drivers can use any electronic device? The two people that I saw using hand-held cellphones on the way to the Legislature this morning on Avenue Road, post-legislation, when this bill becomes law, would be exempt if that were the case, so we need clarification on that.

Take it a step further. Have you ever been driving behind a car in a busy supermarket parking lot when the driver is talking on their hand-held cellphone? I don't think I need to say more than that, but I will. When children are running around, when other cars are pulling in and out of parking spots, people are busy putting their groceries away, there is Mr. or Mrs. Smith blabbing animatedly and not really looking out the window to see what's going on. That's how accidents happen. In fact, one could make the case that they're not accidents at all if the dedication of one's concentration is on that conversation and not out the window.

We've all been there, getting frustrated behind a distracted driver who is talking on a cellphone and either driving 30 kilometres under the speed limit or weaving from one side of the road to the other. That can often be more dangerous than driving on a straight, empty highway. I personally feel safer driving on a highway than I do in the city. In fact, I consider myself a good driver who can multi-task due to things I've been able to do in my past. I am an aggressive—what they call "Montreal driver." That's where I was trained. City drivers scare me: people coming out of nowhere, trying to make it through a yellow light in time, slamming on their brakes because they see something on the road.

So really, all in all, this legislation is like most of the other government bills we've been forced to debate in this House, like the pesticides bill that claims to protect Ontarians from pesticides but in reality limits pesticide control in this province to only 2%.

The government is trying to ban hand-held cellphones and other electronic devices, but only on those roads where they don't really pose as much risk, and apparently relying on moral suasion as opposed to penalties in the way of a deterrent. Are police supposed to be patrolling the highways for cellphones or for speeding drivers? That's one of the questions we must answer. They are out to catch dangerous drivers, not check on children watch-

ing movies in the back of a van or the dad flipping an eye over to the screen up front. Meanwhile, it's a free-for-all on the busiest streets in the middle of a city like Toronto.

I'm guilty of it, as I've said; I know every member of this House at one time or another is as well. We get an e-mail or a call and we respond to it in the car. We have to stop that. This bill would deter me from doing it, especially if all of the me's in this province are given the appropriate consequences through penalty.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions or comments?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I really appreciated some of the remarks made by the honourable member. Interestingly enough, we were having a brief conversation earlier about this very bill, and the members in this general area—I'm not going to name names—were talking about the instance when they decided they were never going to use their cellphone again in their car. It was that split second where they luckily realized that they were almost going to have an accident: They could have hit somebody in a crosswalk; they almost banged into other car. So the issue I think is really clear. The minister knows that it's time for this legislation to be put into place.

We do believe that there are some things the government needs to look at, and we look forward to the opportunity of having those discussions in committee. But there is no doubt that even those of us around this chamber have had situations where we could have ended up having an extremely difficult situation occur and then having to figure out how to deal with that. This is a preventive measure that I think is useful and will benefit so many people.

I can recall that when I was a young woman carpooling with a couple of other women I worked with, one day I decided I wasn't going to be in the carpool. It turned out that the woman who was driving went to Tim Hortons, put a coffee on her dashboard, turned the corner, the hot coffee fell all over her lap and she was in a car accident as a result. You know that these things happen. They happen often, unfortunately. It's these kinds of pieces of legislation that maybe can help resolve some of the distractions that drivers have.

Having said that, there's a little piece in this bill that I'm a little bit concerned about. It says that there is going to be recognition of power-assisted bicycles in the legislation, also known as e-bikes, setting up powers to regulate their operating requirements. I'm looking forward to making sure that e-bikes are allowed on the roads in Ontario. I hope that's what the minister is going to be doing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I was listening to the honourable member from Thornhill speaking about this issue, and he brought to this House many different, important remarks. I'm glad to see him and to hear from him. I know he doesn't like banning stuff much, but he likes some kinds of bans to protect the safety of the people in Ontario.

I listened to him when he was talking about the educational part. He brought his experience to us, and he

talked about the temptation and tendency when you hear the vibration of the BlackBerry or the phone or you feel it, and then you try to reach out to see what's going on. I think it sometimes causes danger. I agree with him, and I share the thought. Most of the time when my wife is sitting beside me, she won't allow me to answer because it will cause harm to myself and to the people around me.

I want to congratulate the Minister of Transportation for bringing this issue forward. I think it's about time to create some kind of protection mechanism in order to protect the people of Ontario—the drivers and also the people who walk on the streets—because sometimes we lose control while we are talking on the phone and not paying attention. If somebody in front of us slams on the brakes, stops accidentally or quickly, and we are not paying attention, we hit them and cause some kind of accident. So I think it's important to create some kind of mechanism.

Talking about the consultation part, I believe the Minister of Transportation mentioned the wide range of consultation, and I think this bill is going to go to committee. We're going to listen to many people and take their input and their advice on this matter, because it's an important matter.

We talked about the logistic approach. I think some people using dispatching, like truck drivers or police or courier companies, will have some kind of exemption. It depends on circumstances, the timing and how we can plan it. I think it's a very important piece of legislation. I think it's about time that it be passed in order to put some safety in place to protect the people in the province of Ontario.

Thank you for allowing me to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: In my previous comments, I didn't congratulate Mr. O'Toole for bringing in this bill. He brought this bill to the Legislature, not three times, as was previously mentioned by the government, but I believe he brought it in a total of six times. It's nice to know that the government has finally listened to Mr. O'Toole. I would respectfully suggest that Mr. O'Toole's bill is a little stronger than this one and perhaps is a little better than this one.

I liked the member from Thornhill's comments, particularly the quote that he gave about the CB radios and looking for populist wedge issues. That quote, of course, came from Mr. Smitherman, the Deputy Premier and Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. It's interesting that he said that in May 2003, and here we are some five years later doing exactly that.

Ontario is in the throes of perhaps the worst economic crisis that this province has seen, certainly since the 1929-34 government. I think that over the next year or two, we may find that the consequences of the economic upheaval that we have may even surpass the days of the Great Depression. However, the government is banning cellphones, distracting the public's attention from the issues that should be debated in this House. An emer-

gency debate on the economy and what actions this government should be taking is certainly in order. I think history will look back on this session of the Legislature with great dissatisfaction.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments? Seeing none, the honourable member from Thornhill has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you to the members from Hamilton Centre, London–Fanshawe and Halton for their additional comments.

It was interesting: As I rose to speak in this response, my cellphone vibrated and I have resisted the urge to take it and read it, which is an adequate reminder of what happens in the car all the time.

I found it interesting when the member from Hamilton Centre discussed the fact that she was having a conversation about the moral suasion inherent in this bill. I think that the conversation over the course of the past two or three weeks since the government tabled this legislation in first reading has been very much about that. It has served, if nothing else, to remind people that what they're doing is wrong and potentially injurious not only to themselves but to anybody around them.

To the member from London–Fanshawe, thank you again for underscoring the educational component, and thank you for confirming the fact that there are other people who have wives who say, "Don't do that"—because we are constantly guilty of pulling the BlackBerrys out when we are driving our automobiles, and that's just the wrong thing to do.

Again, let me summarize what has to happen with this bill. We have to solidify what is and what is not okay to operate while we're driving. We have to specify precisely where: on highways, city streets, parking lots, wherever it's going to be. I hope it's all of the above. We have to figure out how and when this bill dovetails with careless driving that exists in the highway code already. We have to determine how this is to be enforced or even if it will be enforced, and by whom. We have to decide that there either are or are not going to be significant penalties, and by that, I mean demerit points, as opposed to just a fine of up to \$500. And of all these things, the most important is that we have to listen to professionals and we have to listen to all drivers in Ontario in hearings that travel the province and make this an open process.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): It being just about 10:15 of the clock, this House stands in recess until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jim Brownell: I'd like to introduce two constituents from my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, Brian and Sandra Loucks, former educators in the

community of Cornwall. Brian was my principal at Longue Sault Public School for a number of years. Welcome.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm very pleased to introduce, in the east member's gallery, Mr. John Richardson, Commissioner for the Department of Economic and Community Development for the state of Maine, and with him Wade Merritt, the vice-president of the Maine International Trade Center. Mr. Richardson is a former Speaker in the Legislature in the state of Maine. Please join us in welcoming them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Welcome, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's my pleasure to introduce the family of our legislative page from Hamilton Centre, Bradyn Litster. With us today is his family: Bradyn's father, Dwayne, his mother, Monica; his brother Alec and sister Cailyn are here in the west gallery. I'm very pleased and proud to welcome him today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Minister, related to the General Motors pension deficit, and there doesn't seem to be a clear answer on the state of the pension, media reports today indicate that about a year ago it was at roughly \$4.5 billion—that was of course before the stock market meltdown has left the fund short, we're reading approximately another \$1.5 billion. Minister, as part of this government's meetings with GM executives over the past number of days, have you learned yet what the current amount is of the GM pension deficit?

Hon. George Smitherman: I'm privileged to be in a position today, on behalf of a variety of government ministers, to field the question related to pensions, which is of course a serious matter at hand for many, many people in these uncertain times. I can tell the honourable member that, with respect to the discussions that are ongoing with automobile manufacturers, the Minister of Economic Development is initiating those processes with a view towards establishing a clearer sense, doing the due diligence, if you will, on a variety of those matters, as we seek to obtain the clearest sense of the current circumstances and the best sense of opportunities going forward. So although I cannot offer too much additional information to the honourable member, I can tell him that this is part and parcel the nature of the conversations that are ongoing.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The minister mentions due diligence, and it's unfortunate that he doesn't have that information today. We know the conversations have been occurring for at least a couple of weeks with General Motors. When you look at the history with respect to this obligation, we know what happened in 1992 with

respect to the former NDP government; the rules were changed, so that GM is the only Ontario company paying into the province's pension benefits guarantee fund. That means of course that in the event—certainly we're not suggesting that's going to happen, but anything is possible at this stage of the game—in the event of GM's bankruptcy, taxpayers will be on the hook for that shortfall in the pension. We're talking about, perhaps, billions of dollars. Minister, are you and your colleagues taking this substantial debt on taxpayers' shoulders into consideration in deciding on the terms of any—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Deputy?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the direct part of the honourable member's question: Is this matter, that of the pension circumstances, being taken into consideration in the context of the discussions with automobile manufacturers and General Motors? Yes, most certainly.

The honourable member's question does underscore the very extraordinary importance of the automobile sector in the province of Ontario. That's why we do think it's important to be engaged with our partners at the federal government—your former colleague Minister Clement, working alongside Minister Bryant—because this sector is an extraordinarily important one and because the matters at hand, including that which has been raised by the honourable member in the House today, are, of course, very significant.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: People who are concerned about the situation are not going to get much solace from those kinds of responses. There's no details, just more rhetoric. It confirms the Premier's remarks yesterday that he doesn't have a plan B if any of the three automakers go under. That was the same answer the Premier gave three years ago in response to the crisis in manufacturing. He had no plan B, and now that industry is disappearing with a real risk that the auto industry is next.

Minister, with Ontario taxpayers on the hook for billions of dollars, how do you expect Ontarians to have any confidence in your government when you tell them you have no contingency plan in place if GM, Ford or Chrysler go under?

Hon. George Smitherman: I don't think that Ontarians viewing the Ontario Legislature today will take much confidence from the approach of the honourable member, with respect. These are difficult matters; everybody acknowledges that. The gravity of the circumstances are really rather extraordinary and no one is pretending otherwise.

The honourable member stands up in his place today and demands to know a number. What's interesting is that the member today demands instantaneous information, but for the better part of the time that we've been in government for the last five years, as we worked with the automotive industry, this party actually had a policy of benign neglect, voting against all measures which were designed to help to stabilize a sector which is obviously under a lot of pressure. The sector knows and the

people of the province of Ontario know that the government of Ontario, led by Dalton McGuinty, understands this is an important sector in our economy. That's why we're working so carefully in partnership with the federal government at this moment.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Tired partisan rhetoric.

My next question is to the Attorney General. Attorney General, can you confirm that it's the crown's policy to appeal a decision releasing an accused facing serious charges where the crown's case is so strong that bail is not justified?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The crown takes prosecution of every serious case and prosecutes them to the full extent of the law. We prosecute them at every stage, we take tough positions on bail, take tough positions on the trial and on sentencing. We will continue to do so, and I'll look forward to my colleague's question for further details of what specifically he would like me to address.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: That should have been either a yes or a no answer. It's what members of the public are entitled to know since it's the public's confidence in the justice system that the Attorney General should be concerned with.

Again, back to him: Related to the bail system, Attorney General, can you confirm that it is the crown's policy to appeal a bail decision that names a former victim of an accused as a surety or supervisor for that accused, on serious charges of sexual violence?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The policy of the crown with respect to every serious charge is to prosecute them to the full extent of the law. That obtains whether it's at bail, whether it's at trial, whether it's with respect to the sentencing.

One of the things that we're doing now is to take a look at every part of the trial process from our perspective—the bail part, the trial, the sentencing and the post-sentence part; take a look and see whether the policies that we have are the right ones; look and see whether the coordination we have with our other justice partners—such as the police, such as corrections, other agencies—is as strong as it should be; take a look and see whether the supports that we have are what they need to be; and then take a look at what the law is in relation to those. We want to make sure that any revolving door of justice is stopped.

1040

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Again, regrettably, the Attorney General can't give a straight answer when he could read it straight out of the crown policy manual. Nathaniel O'Brien, accused of murdering Susan John and her mother, Saramma Varughese, was released on bail, despite DNA linking him to a violent sexual assault and despite victim identification.

We learn now that the judge named his mother as one of his sureties, even though the media reports that in 2007, O'Brien was arrested for beating her. This is truly

bizarre, Minister. Susan and Saramma's family are outraged by these facts and they will be holding a rally here at Queen's Pak this Saturday demanding a public inquiry into their deaths.

Minister, you're going to be speaking at that rally. Will you be giving the public inquiry they're demanding and deserve?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I will be at the vigil. I will be there to speak. I will be there to express not only our condolences, but I'll be there to express our anger and our determination: our determination to take a look at every part of the justice system to make sure that those who are serious threats to society stay where they need to be and in custody. We're going to stop the revolving door of justice where it revolves. We're going to look at the bail part. We're going to look at the sentencing. We're going to look at the post-sentencing. We have a crime summit coming up with the police on the 25th. We are going to make sure that nothing is left unturned to protect the safety of the members of the public.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the acting Premier. Media reports suggest that General Motors Canada was facing a pension shortfall of \$4.9 billion a year ago. That shortfall is now likely over \$6 billion. The General Motors pension shortfall is very likely the tip of the iceberg. There are likely many other pension plans in Ontario that are also in trouble.

The McGuinty government has had five years to implement meaningful reforms to help protect and sustain the pension plans of Ontarians. The McGuinty government has talked a lot, but why has there been no action over the last five years to do something meaningful to help sustain and protect the hard-earned pensions of Ontario workers?

Hon. George Smitherman: I do want to thank the honourable member for the question on the matter raised as well by the Leader of the Opposition. I'll say the same things that I did to him, which is that obviously, this matter—one of many that is on the table in the circumstances that are being faced at the moment—does underscore the pressing challenges associated with the automotive sector in the province of Ontario. That's why we're engaged proactively, the Minister of Economic Development working alongside the federal minister in Washington today, seeking to make sure that, as these discussions go forward, the important interests of Ontario, Ontarians and workers are contemplated. More will be known about these circumstances as events continue to unfold.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government wants to pretend that this somehow is something that's just appeared in the last four or five months. The fact of the matter is that this has been a growing problem, not only in the auto sector, but in the forest sector and in the manufacturing sector generally. We have literally had, for five years, a ticking time bomb in terms of the underfunding of pension plans.

My question, and the question that I think a lot of Ontario workers want to know, is, where has the McGuinty government been for the last five years? Lots of talk on this issue, but no action. Why has the McGuinty government failed to take action over the last five years to protect people's hard-earned pensions?

Hon. George Smitherman: It's always nice to see the leader of the third party arrive at a new issue as if he's got no history with its past. He wants to know where we stand. Well, the people that worked and were pensioners at Stelco in the Hamilton community well understand that, as a government, we stood by them and we worked at their side to address the circumstance that the honourable member, through his service, had contributed to.

These are challenging times for those workers and for Ontarians and it does underscore most certainly the necessity of working very, very closely with the federal government and with manufacturers in these circumstances. That's the work that's ongoing, and that is the work that ministers of this government are engaged in as we speak.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Let me say, the Acting Premier isn't helping Bob Rae's leadership campaign with that answer.

The McGuinty government constantly wants to point to something that happened 20 years ago or something that may be happening in Washington or something that may be happening elsewhere in the world, when the fact of the matter is the McGuinty government has had five years when it could have taken concrete action here in Ontario to help sustain and protect workers' pensions. In fact, Professor Arthurs has said today that there are concrete things that needed to be done, and many of us in this Legislature—my colleague from Hamilton Centre, my colleague from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek—have been pointing this out to you for the last three or four years.

Again, the question: Why has the McGuinty government only talked, talked, talked about sustaining pensions when we've had a ticking time bomb over the last five years?

Hon. George Smitherman: We see the extent to which the honourable member seeks to make up for a lack of action on his part on the subject. He talks about the active engagement of the member from Stoney Creek over the last three or four years, when the member has only been in the Legislature for a year. This is the kind of excess that we're being subjected to quite regularly.

I find it interesting, as well, that a report done by a very respected individual that came out today has already been summarized by the honourable member and characterized with some of the language that he offered. This is a report by a respected individual that warrants consideration and will be helpful as we go through the very important work that the Minister of Finance spoke about yesterday. We're very grateful to Mr. Arthurs for having completed this report, and we will be working very carefully to investigate the advice that it offers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question. Leader of the third party.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I think what we just heard is an indication that we'll get more talk, talk, talk from the McGuinty government on pensions—no action.

POVERTY

Mr. Howard Hampton: Again to the Acting Premier: I also want to ask about the Ontario Association of Food Banks, which released a report today that shows that poverty costs Ontarians \$38 billion a year in health and social costs and lost employment revenues. That's \$3,000 per Ontario household. My question is this: At a time when this report says the government should be taking immediate action to fight poverty, why is the McGuinty government in fact slowing down its proposed fight against poverty in Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I don't know why the member opposite thinks we're slowing down our fight against poverty in this province. The report that has come out today on the cost of poverty is exactly what we need to understand what the cost of poverty is.

Poverty is no longer something we need to address simply because it is the right thing to do. Poverty is something we need to address because it's costing us too much to have too many people living in poverty. We know that when kids grow up in poverty, when they arrive at school not quite as ready as the other kids to learn, when they're away a little more often, when they drop out of school, they're far more likely to go on to social assistance, to get involved in our youth justice system, to end up in the child welfare system. We really need to address poverty in this province, and this government is committed to reducing poverty.

Mr. Howard Hampton: To cite just a few examples: In October 2007, the McGuinty government, with much fanfare, announced that they were going to invest in a low-income dental program. We're now on the verge of 2009, and the McGuinty government has not put one red cent into a low-income dental program. You've spent the last year talking, talking, talking about poverty, but in fact have done nothing.

My question again is this: At a time when more and more people are falling into poverty, when this very reputable study says that you should be doing something immediate to take on poverty, why is the McGuinty government continuing to talk, talk, talk and do nothing?

1050

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I understand the politics of poverty and I understand that the member opposite wants to make political hay out of this, but let me tell you, this is a government that, as we speak, is reducing levels of poverty in this province. The Ontario child benefit, which you voted against, is reducing poverty in this province. The increases in minimum wage, which you voted against, are reducing poverty in this province. I'm proud of our record, I'm proud of our commitment to poverty, and I would welcome the support of all members in this House to be committed to reducing poverty in Ontario.

Mr. Howard Hampton: This is astounding. The McGuinty government wants to talk about the politics of poverty when we're here to address the reality of poverty. This is a government that took away the back-to-school clothing allowance from the poorest kids in Ontario. Now, as we're facing cold winter temperatures, this is the McGuinty government that took away the winter clothing allowance from the poorest kids in Ontario. Another report shows that tooth decay leads to declines in health overall and huge costs for the health care system—a McGuinty government that hasn't put one penny into a low-income dental program.

I ask again: When are we going to see some real and immediate action from the McGuinty government to take on poverty, rather than more talk about politics?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It's hard for me to know where to start, frankly. The Ontario child benefit, which I'm convinced the member opposite still doesn't understand, because if he understood it he would support people like Jacquie Maund of Campaign 2000, who actually recognize the importance of the Ontario child benefit. It does many good things, but one of the best things that the Ontario child benefit does is it combines the programs—winter coats, back to school, Ontario child care and OCCS—into one benefit that families can count on whether they're on social assistance or whether they are taking the sometimes difficult step of getting back into the labour market. Because we know that families who are working at low-paying jobs need extra support for their kids. The Ontario child benefit does that. In addition, we have—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Labour. Yesterday, my colleague from Dufferin—Caledon asked you an excellent question and, as usual, she didn't get an answer. I would like to revisit her point. Ms. Jones asked if you would release the impact cost analysis that should have been prepared before you introduced Bill 119.

My question is simple: Did you even complete an impact cost analysis?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I would like to thank the member for the opportunity to talk about impact cost analysis. I want to read him something here from the Council of Ontario Construction Associations. Here's their position and what they've said: They "support a mandatory coverage system. Such a regime ought to ensure those exposed to risk on construction sites pay or have paid on their behalf WSIB premiums. This would foster a level business environment and serve to reduce the size and scope of the underground economy. Presently, just 61% of the construction industry pays 100% of benefits."

We want to support those companies that pay. We want to make sure that we level the playing field within the construction industry. I don't understand why that member or any of those members can't get—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Minister, I didn't hear anything in that response about an impact cost analysis.

It's very clear to me and thousands of small construction business owners that you have not done your homework on your WSIB bill, Bill 119.

Let me ask: What analysis did you complete? Where is the proof that your bill will actually make thousands safer? How many thousands are we talking about? Surely you know that. How, exactly, will this bill uncover the underground economy? An answer to any of these questions would be appreciated.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I guess the member doesn't understand the difference between 60% and 100%. Well, when you have 60% paying for 100% of the costs, that is completely unfair. Who is this going to protect? All those independent operators, all those construction workers who today are not covered, are putting their lives at risk on those construction sites, doing a lot of the work in all of our communities, building homes, schools, hospitals, roads. We want to make sure that they're insured. We want to make sure that when they go to work in the morning, they come home at night safe and if something does happen, that they do have benefits to take care of them, to take care of them to age 65, to make sure that we work with them and their families to make sure that they are covered.

This proposed legislation is about safety for our construction workers and it's about levelling the playing field for business.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Yesterday, the minister stood in this House and promised that grandparents eligible for temporary care assistance today will be eligible tomorrow. It is tomorrow, and our special guests in the gallery have been cut off: Erlene, raising three children in Hamilton; Clare, raising one grandkid in London; Connie, raising one grandkid in Ottawa; Brenda, raising two kids in Brantford. Oh, I'm sorry, they're not cut off until January. They know that the minister's statements are inaccurate.

Will this minister look these grandparents in the eye and explain her statements and actions in the last few months?

Interruption.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, let me—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. We welcome all our guests to the Legislature. We encourage you to observe the proceedings, but just ask that you not participate in proceedings. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, let me say thank you to the grandmothers and also all those family members or neighbours who are taking care of children in need. Thank you very much.

Yes, I said yesterday that those who are eligible today for temporary care assistance will be eligible tomorrow. I'm so surprised when the Tories come in and heckle me about this program, because under their leadership the program went from \$14 million to \$8 million. They cut the program and they're standing up today in support of comments by the NDP. This program is in existence today, has been in existence for the past 30 years and will continue to be in existence. But I'll say to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: I invite the minister to come outside. There are another 150 grandparents who want to talk to you.

The minister continues to confuse the facts and refuses to acknowledge her government's callous and mean-spirited decision to cut off grandkids from the funding they need. Since this minister's words and actions mean she no longer has the confidence of those she's supposed to serve, including some of Ontario's most vulnerable people, why won't she do the honourable thing and why won't she resign?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It is very unfortunate that this member is using this tactic to scare the people off. That's not true. This program is not going to be cancelled like this member is telling us. This program is in existence and will continue to be in existence. We are supporting those children who are in need of protection and helping the parents or neighbours who are supporting them.

There are four other provinces that have a similar program to the one in Ontario. Five provinces and two other territories don't have this program, but we believe in it and we will continue to work with those who are taking care of children to support them on a temporary basis.

1100

EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: My question today is for the Minister of Labour. Minister—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Hamilton East: Maybe you want to go outside?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Minister, you as well as I know that virtually every person in the province of Ontario is concerned about the economy, and with that come concerns about whether they have a job or whether they'll be able to find a job.

I was in contact with a constituent just recently who told me that he was lured by the promise of employment. He paid \$300 to a temporary agency for what was called a required security guard training course. When the course was over, he was told there were no jobs available and he could not have his money back.

Minister, that \$300 could have been used to pay his rent. Now he has no job, and if he can't make his rent payment, he may find himself homeless. Can the minister

tell us how this situation could be legal in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for Pickering–Scarborough East for his heartfelt question. I sincerely regret that your constituent now finds himself in this situation. When we undertook a consultation earlier this year, we heard similar stories. We also heard stories about some agencies that charge large fees up front in order to place workers and then only provide workers with a few part-time assignments that do not even recover the initial payment. Unfortunately, in our current legislation, there are no prohibitions to prevent the few unsavoury agencies that would choose to take advantage of vulnerable workers from charging these fees.

This issue was addressed by my parliamentary assistant, Vic Dhillon, in his private member's bill introduced last season, and is being looked at seriously. I'd like to take a moment to thank Mr. Dhillon for all his hard work.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'm aware that there were extensive consultations done on temporary agencies. It's my understanding there were other issues dealt with at the same time during these consultations. Could the minister tell us if, in effect, that's the case, and what these issues were, as well as when we can expect to see the minister move forward to address some of these critical issues for these people?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Thank you again for the question. The other issues looked at by my parliamentary assistant, Vic Dhillon, during our consultation on work through temporary help agencies were current provisions in the act that deny public holiday pay, severance and termination pay to temp workers; barriers to permanent employment; whether clients who use temp workers should be held responsible for their Employment Standards Act violations; and if there is a need to provide information to temporary workers about their assignments.

Mr. Dhillon and I have reviewed over 120 submissions we received and will be looking very closely, with our colleague Deb Matthews on her poverty agenda, and hope to be making an announcement very soon on this important issue.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, the cost of caring for a child in foster care is approximately \$900 per month. The cost of a child being raised in a kinship home is \$231 under temporary care assistance. What is your plan B to offset the increased cost to the foster care system when these children are forced out of their grandparents' home as a result of you cutting off temporary care assistance for grandparents raising their grandchildren?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, the temporary care assistance program is there to stay, not like when your government was in power: You cut it from \$14

million to \$8 million. I understand why your colleagues asked you to ask this question, because you were not a member at that time.

This government is supporting those who are taking care of these children and will continue. In December, we're giving another 2% increase. What this party did is, they voted against it. Every time we move forward to help children, to help their parents, to help their caregivers, what these two parties are doing is, they are voting against it. Shame on you.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: If the minister would like a history lesson, I'm happy to give her one. Temporary care assistance came in under Janet Ecker under Mike Harris in this Parliament.

Minister, there aren't enough foster spaces in the system now for the children who need it. These grandparents are helping you to look after children who would otherwise be living in group homes at a much higher social and economic cost to the government and to them. What is your ministry's plan to accommodate children being forced to leave kinship families?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, let me correct what the member just said. Temporary care assistance has been in existence since the 1970s. What they did—that government introduced “settled intention” into the legislation in 1997 and they moved it under Ontario Works. They stand up and they're saying, “What a shame it is that this program is under Ontario Works.” It was your government that moved this program under Ontario Works.

We will continue to support the parents and the grandparents and family members who are taking care of those children. Again, in December, we're giving a 2% increase, and we're thanking all of those who are stepping in when children are in need.

UNION CERTIFICATION

Mr. Peter Kormos: I have a question of the Minister of Labour. When over 60% of Ontario's jobs are part-time jobs, and when more than 3.5 million Ontarians work at jobs that pay less than \$25,000 a year, and when more than 85% of those in those low-wage jobs are non-unionized, if this government is really serious about poverty, why won't it permit card-based certification for all Ontario workers, not just some of them?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: This government has worked closely with labour, with employers and with employees through Bill 144. We feel that we struck the right balance to bring fairness and stability to the workplace.

I can say that we have an excellent record when it comes to labour relations. Some 97% of collective agreements are done without any work stoppage. They're done in agreement by bringing the parties to the table, resolving any issues, any disputes that they have amongst themselves.

I feel we're doing a very good job here when it comes to the province of Ontario. It's a record that many look to

with envy. I continue to keep on with that record and to make sure that the record stays strong the way it is.

Mr. Peter Kormos: This government's denial to the vast majority of Ontario workers of the right to card-based certification denies those workers access to the provisions of the Labour Relations Act. Fair-minded Ontarians, like those amongst thousands who have signed cards like these, want to know why this government turns its back on the majority of workers, the most vulnerable workers, the poorest workers, the hardest-working workers, those who work at two and three jobs, by denying them and continuing to deny them card-based certification when it allows other workers that same right to form a union by basis of card-based certification.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: We focus on the workers. We make sure those workers are healthy and safe and that they work in fair environments. We make sure that we uphold the Employment Standards Act. We are undergoing work and consultation when it comes to vulnerable workers with temporary work agencies. It's about making sure that we work in partnership with our employees, our hard-working Ontarians, the employer and labour groups. We've done that, and we've done that very well. The record speaks for itself: 97% of collective agreements without work stoppage. I think we've brought peace, stability and fairness into the marketplace.

HERITAGE CONSERVATION

Mr. Jim Brownell: My question is to the Minister of Culture. All my colleagues here in the Legislature have the great privilege of representing the finest people in the greatest province in Canada, the province of Ontario. Our province has a proud history that has been shaped to a great extent by the individuals who led it as Premier. Until recently, though, the legacy of these former Premiers was not properly recognized, and in some instances their final resting places remained anonymous tombstones. During the last term, I worked diligently to correct this and ensure that these final resting places receive proper recognition. On Thursday, November 13, the former Premiers of Ontario finally received their due recognition. Can the minister explain what the government is doing to recognize and honour the services of Ontario's former Premiers?

1110

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: The McGuinty government, through the Ontario—

Interjection.

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: There are those of us who value the heritage of this province, and one of the groups that values the heritage of this province is the Dalton McGuinty government, and through the Ontario Heritage Trust, another group that seems to think what we have in this province is worth honouring, they recently launched the Premiers' gravesites program with a ceremony in St. Andrews West honouring Ontario's first Premier, John Sandfield Macdonald.

The Ontario Heritage Trust provided \$412,000 to create this program, which honours the service and achieve-

ments of our former Premiers and their efforts to build a stronger Ontario. I'm pleased to advise the House that this new program was inspired from a private member's bill championed by the member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, and it has attracted considerable media and I think—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Brownell: I can tell you Thursday was a great day for the province of Ontario and for all those who passionately advocate for the preservation of our history, and I and my colleagues have done that here in Ontario.

I want to thank those members who supported me in the past with this initiative: the previous Minister of Culture, Caroline Di Cocco; the member from Elgin-Middlesex-London; those who came out to the gravesites in 2006, to the ceremonies that I held; and Premier McGuinty himself for his leadership.

Thanks to the Premier—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Timmins, please come to order.

Mr. Brownell: Thanks to the Premiers' gravesite program, the former leaders of Ontario are receiving due recognition, communities across the province are gaining a source of community pride, and a great opportunity has been created in Ontario to learn more about those who led our province as Premier. This program comes courtesy of the Ontario Heritage Trust, a great agency that does excellent work preserving and promoting our past.

Minister, can you tell us what other initiatives the trust is engaged in to promote awareness of our heritage across Ontario?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I thank the honourable colleague for his interest and understanding of how important this entire heritage initiative is.

The Ontario Heritage Trust continues to work with various partners and individuals to commemorate the people, the places and the events that have shaped our history and shape our culture—even a culture that includes the member from the opposite side of the House. This year, the Ontario Heritage Trust brought hundreds of communities together to participate in 54 successful Doors Open Ontario events.

Through this innovative program, hundreds of communities showcase their rich local heritage while attracting thousands of visitors to participate in this unique experience in cultural tourism, which, for the interest of the House, hugely boosts local economies at a time when such economies can use a boost.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: To the Minister of Health. Yesterday, the Halton regional council unanimously passed a resolution to freeze growth until it receives well-needed funding for hospitals. I repeat, there will be no more building permits approved in Oakville and Milton

until this government lives up to the infrastructure obligations. This is a very serious matter, minister.

Your government delayed progress at Oakville hospital because of a supposed lack of construction capacity. Well, that was then and this is now. We live in a whole new world in the past three months.

It's time to put the Oakville and Milton hospital projects back on the books. Minister, will you do that?

Hon. David Caplan: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to say to the honourable member that I appreciated the chance to speak with him the other day and also to my colleague from Oakville.

A couple of things that are important: First, we recognize there are substantial growth pressures out there, and that's why our government, this year, is investing \$9.9 billion in infrastructure—a number that is unprecedented. There is some limitation in construction capacity, and the honourable member can suggest, if he wishes, that everything has changed in the last three months, but it is our obligation on projects as big as that one—which is an extraordinarily large project in Oakville—that we actually have companies that bid against one another in a tendering process that is competitive and gets value, and those conditions do not exist at present.

We're working very vigorously with the local member, Kevin Flynn, on trying to have the fastest possible timetable, because there is a government in Ontario that supports hospital construction; it's our government. That party continues to propose—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The bottom line is that Halton needs hospitals and they need them now.

Your government's failed policies across the board have contributed to this situation. From your irregular municipal funding to your disastrous economic mismanagement, the regional council in Halton is being forced to resort to these kinds of ultimatums. I understand, Minister, that these are tough decisions, but that does not excuse your lack of action.

Minister, will you commit today to immediately renew the construction on Trafalgar hospital in Oakville and immediately begin the process of expanding the current hospital in Milton?

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, the member uses the word "ultimatum" and suggests that's an appropriate tactic. I don't think that's right.

I'm looking forward to the meeting that I'm going to have with Regional Chair Carr. Our government has nothing to be embarrassed about with respect to the investments that we've made in Halton—\$386 million on highway improvements. The land for the hospital, in the first place, was provided free of charge. We've invested \$197 million in Halton schools, \$332 million in transit investments, \$10 million for MIII projects, \$23 million

for municipal roads, \$12 million for affordable housing plus the municipal gas tax payments.

We agree, there are areas where additional investment is needed in Halton. I've been working closely with the member from Oakville on this very matter, and I'm looking forward to the conversation with the regional chair.

We don't think ultimatums are the right solution. We want to work in partnership with Halton region. We want to see more growth and development in that community, and we're committed to building new hospital infrastructure, starting in Oakville when we—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

NURSES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Out of a \$40-billion budget, why did the minister decide to break his promise to hire the desperately needed 9,000 nurses?

Hon. David Caplan: I'm glad that the member raises this, because there is no broken promise. In fact, because of the economic circumstances, we will be lengthening the time over which we will be able to do that. We had originally hoped to be able to do so over the course of 2011, but because of the economic circumstances, it will take us a little bit longer. But we will not do what the NDP did when they were in government, which was fire over 3,000 nurses, and we will not do what the Conservatives did when they were in office, which was see a reduction of over 6,000 nursing positions.

This government has taken a different approach. To date, we have seen over 8,000 nurses hired in this province. I look forward, as I did earlier today meeting with the Ontario Nurses' Association—and they, too, understood that we are fully committed to seeing those 9,000 nurses in practice in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The Ontario health care system needs more nurses now. Why did the minister choose to balance the books on the backs of our nurses?

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, we are hiring nurses today. Somebody did a search of Workopolis and found over 500 positions for Ontario nurses currently on offer, so the member's information and the characterization that she makes are fully incorrect.

This government hires nurses. The NDP fired nurses. The Conservatives fired nurses. On this side of the House, we know that we need front-line medical personnel to provide the high quality of care that Ontarians would require to lower wait times in emergency departments.

We've sat with our nurses to make sure that they are an integral partner with us, moving forward. I had a chance to speak with them today at their biennial convention, and they know that they have a partner in Premier McGuinty and in this government.

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Reza Moridi: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

There is snow on the ground this morning, which means that the cold and flu season is officially upon us. For many Ontarians the flu is simply an inconvenience, but for our province's most vulnerable populations, the elderly and chronically ill, the flu can be life-threatening. It results in extended hospital stays and causes unneeded stress for family and friends.

For the past eight years, the government has offered free flu shots in an effort to reduce the number of Ontarians who fall ill with the flu. I ask the minister, how can Ontarians access this program?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member from Richmond Hill, but I also want to acknowledge the member opposite who introduced this program into Ontario. It was certainly the right thing to do and I want to remind all members of this House and all Ontarians to get a flu shot. I had mine a few weeks ago. It was easy and it was painless.

For the 2008-09 flu season, Ontario has ordered five million doses of the influenza vaccine. Free flu shots are available throughout the province through doctors' offices, employer-sponsored clinics, public health units, local pharmacies and here today at Queen's Park, downstairs in the basement. They're also available in hospitals, long-term-care homes, community health centres and CCACs. We are trying to make it as simple as possible for Ontarians to get their flu shot. It is my sincere hope that anyone living in Ontario who is more than six months old will take the time to get a flu shot.

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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Reza Moridi: I would like to thank the minister for his advice, but I am wondering about the effectiveness of this program. Ontario is the only province to offer a fully funded vaccination program. I want to ensure that it's really reducing the number of Ontarians who fall ill and relieving pressures within Ontario's health care system. Can the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care tell the House whether this program has successfully reduced the number of hospitalizations and doctors' offices visits across the province?

Hon. David Caplan: The member is right. I know that the member from Waterloo would agree with me about the program's effectiveness. I'm very concerned about ensuring that our precious health care dollars are being spent on programs that produce results. Ontario's influenza immunization program was the first large-scale program of its kind in the world. I'm glad to be able to tell the House that a recent study by the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Studies, or ICES, as it's called, found that Ontario's flu shot program annually prevents 300 deaths, 1,000 hospitalizations, 30,000 visits to emergency departments and 200,000 visits to doctors' offices. It has already relieved tremendous pressure on Ontario's health care system.

I'm also pleased to say that the world has taken notice. Our flu shot program has been hailed by the World Health Organization as a model for other countries to follow—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

NURSES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm glad to hear about the success of the flu shot. I guess this government did something right.

Anyway, my question is for the Minister of Health, and I'd like to just set the record straight on something else also. The reality is—I don't know what the NDP did regarding nurses, but I do know that we hired an additional 12,000 nurses. I also know that the former Minister of Health—under his leadership, the government fired 791 nurses, at a cost of about \$97 million.

My question is to the minister. Minister, today, your answer provided cold comfort to ONA. I'd like you to address the issue of how Quinte Health is going to cope with the fact that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. David Caplan: I do agree that my colleague did introduce the flu shot program. She also, unfortunately, left some devastation when it came to nurses in the province of Ontario. I wouldn't rely upon press releases from the Conservative Party of Ontario, but rather from the College of Nurses. The number of registered nurses in Ontario fell by 3,000 between 1990 and 1995 under the NDP. There were 6,200 fewer working in hospitals in the first four years in office of the Conservative government. There were 8,000 new nursing jobs created by my colleague, Minister Smitherman, when in office, offering a guaranteed job to every new nurse in the province.

There is more that I have that I can share, but those are the facts. Ontario nurses, when I was at the ONA convention, readily acknowledge the support that this government has—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is to the Minister of Health. People listening obviously heard that he wasn't comparing apples to apples. The reality is that we hired 12,000 nurses, and the reality is that we introduced community care access centres. There were 7,000 nurses that went to community care access centres. You should get your facts straight.

So my question to you is, Minister, at a time when Ontario needs 10,000 nurses, according to Doris Grinspun of the RNAO—and they need them now to catch up with the rest of the country—why have you postponed the hiring of 9,000? Why are you allowing 50 nurses to be cut at Quinte and somewhere up to 400 in Hamilton and other places in the province?

Hon. David Caplan: Once again, the member unfortunately has her facts wrong. I'm glad that I was able to set her straight earlier.

There are other indicators as well. For example, there was a tremendous shift that we saw, beginning with the New Democrats, where nurses were moved from full-time to part-time to casual positions. In fact, that was accelerated by the Conservative government. Under our government, the number of nurses working full-time has increased 10%. These are facts that are indisputable.

There's another fact: This member and her party advocate the elimination of the Ontario health premium. The Ontario health premium accounts for \$3 billion of health care funding to hire those nurses in the province of Ontario. This member and her colleagues advocate the elimination of that premium, and this member must answer the question: What services would she cut from the health care system?

OBSTETRICAL CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is also to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Does this minister believe that newborn babies should be separated from their mothers at birth?

Hon. David Caplan: I think the answer to that is no. We're providing tremendous maternal and newborn care right across the province. In fact, I had the great pleasure to introduce, for the first time in a long time, a pediatric strategy here in the province of Ontario, expanded NICU capability.

In fact, because of the work that has gone on previously, Ontario has been able to see a tremendous brain gain. We have been able to attract Dr. Shoo Lee, one of Canada's foremost neonatologists, to Ontario. He not only provides tremendous care, but he provides incredible research.

This member would know the commitment we have placed behind these services and that we will continue well into the future. I look forward to the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Today, Hamiltonians learned that 39 doctors and department heads at two Hamilton hospitals say that that's exactly what's going to happen when the Health Sciences restructuring occurs. Therefore, they're saying that high-risk deliveries won't even be able to be performed in Hamilton anymore. Will this minister finally do his job and send Hamilton Health Sciences and the LHINs back to the drawing board, so that mothers and babies and children and adults can get the health services they need at the McMaster site?

Hon. David Caplan: The plan at Hamilton Health Sciences specifically is all about providing better care. I would quote for the member Brenda Flaherty, the executive vice-president of clinical operations; she says, "I certainly respect their"—referring to the doctors—"concerns and want to work closely with them." She goes on, "I'm confident we can build a model that provides high-quality care to our obstetrics and gynecology patients."

I know that the officials at the hospital are confident that Hamilton Health Sciences and doctors can reach an

agreement so that high-risk deliveries will still be done at McMaster. I know that the proposal is a change. But in fact, it will, in the opinion of the people there, be able to produce better care. I know that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

MEDICAL RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. Atreo Medical, an Ontario company, was featured in Time Magazine in 2007, "Best invention of the year." In its article, Time magazine described the CPRGlove, a device which is designed to "talk you through proper resuscitation." This made-in-Hamilton innovation was developed by three biochemical and electrical engineers from McMaster University, Corey Centen, Nilesh Patel and Sarah Smith.

Minister, what is the Ministry of Research and Innovation doing to ensure that life-saving innovations such as the CPRGlove have a chance to come to market and create the next generation of high-paying jobs here in Ontario?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank the member for bringing this McMaster medical innovation to the attention of the Legislature this morning. I'm pleased to say that the Ministry of Research and Innovation has invested some \$500,000 in Atreo through the investment accelerator fund. The funding will help Atreo bring to market its award-winning CPRGlove.

The researchers at Atreo started with one question: If someone suddenly collapsed in front of you, clutching their chest, would you know what to do? Could you calmly and confidently perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation, knowing it requires 100 compressions a minute to a depth of five centimetres? Through the incorporation of multiple sensors in a wearable glove, they invented a device that collects sensory data and instructs the user on where to apply pressure, how fast and how hard to make the compressions, and reminding them to call 911 and to check for a pulse.

Atreo hopes to make—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: In October, Dr. Martin James O'Donnell, an assistant professor at McMaster University, received a Pfizer Cardiovascular Research Award. In addition, McMaster recently announced Dr. Sonia Anand, a celebrated researcher and physician, as the university's first holder of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario and Michael G. DeGroote Chair in Population Health Research. The contributions of these members of our community speaks to the importance of medical research and innovation in our city.

Minister, what is the Ministry of Research and Innovation doing to support groundbreaking medical research and institutions such as Hamilton Regional Cancer Centre and Hamilton Health Sciences?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I would agree with my colleague from Hamilton Mountain that there is world-class

research going on in Hamilton that we can all, in this House, be very proud of. I can tell you that our ministry is supporting a number of amazing projects. MRI has invested over \$1.2 million in groundbreaking research at Hamilton Health Sciences, including some \$589,680 in a project led by Dr. Ranjan Sur looking at photodynamic therapy and brachytherapy and palliation of advanced lung cancer.

We've also invested \$1 million in the Hamilton Regional Cancer Centre, including \$838,000 in projects led by Dr. Gurmit Singh for the development and testing of a biophotonic platform of in vivo assessment of tumour progression and treatment efficacy; and as well, some \$58,886, an investment looking at the treatment of thrombosis, atherosclerosis, and osteoporosis at the Hamilton civic hospital research centre.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1133 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Kuldip Kular: In the east visitors' gallery, I have a family friend, Mrs. Satwant Aulakh, who is visiting us from Seattle, USA, on a business and leisure trip. I want to welcome her. Accompanying her is my dear wife, Jessie Kular.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'd like to welcome to this House Ms. Gilboord's grade 5 class from Eitz Chaim School—which means “tree of life”—in my riding of Thornhill. They will be joining us in the west gallery at 1:30, but I want to get their name into Hansard.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Tim Hudak: Andrew Lanese is a courageous 11-year-old boy in my riding; he lives in Pelham. He has been living with a progressive degenerative disease called Hunter syndrome since he was an infant. If left untreated, Andrew faces further damage to his tissue and organ functions and even, sadly, premature death.

There is just one medication available to help Andrew's condition, called Elaprase. If Andrew lived in British Columbia or Alberta, the cost of Elaprase would be funded by the public drug program. Unfortunately, here in the province of Ontario they have to pay for the treatments out of pocket. Through active fundraising efforts, overwhelming community support and significant financial sacrifices by the loving Lanese family, they have raised enough money to start Andrew on therapy privately this year. The results have been remarkable. Andrew's motor skills have noticeably improved, and he can now walk greater distances on his own.

Unfortunately, the money raised for Andrew's treatment will run out next month. In fact, the Lanese family is hosting a benefit in St. Catharines tomorrow to help replenish the fund for Andrew's treatment. Anyone interested in making a donation can please call 905-227-1521 or e-mail tbozza@cogeco.ca.

I understand that the Ministry of Health has recently approved funding for some Hunter syndrome patients—there are only about six in the entire province of Ontario—but, as of yet, not Andrew. I have called on the Minister of Health today to personally intervene to treat everyone living with Hunter syndrome in the province of Ontario and particularly Andrew Lanese.

UKRAINIAN GENOCIDE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I rise today in commemoration of the Holodomor. This was a purposeful genocide of famine perpetrated upon 10 million people in Ukraine who died in a very short period of time between 1932 and 1933.

I also rise in non-partisan support of my colleague Dave Levac's private member's bill and urge the government to pass it, recognizing November 22 as a day of commemoration for the Holodomor.

I also keep in mind a person from my riding, Anne Romaniuk, who passed away not too long ago, who as a small child who lived through the Holodomor remembered her grandmother starving to death.

This is an incredible oversight in genocide studies. We certainly also urge the Minister of Education to make sure that it is commemorated in the curriculum of all students across Ontario who study genocide.

In particular, I want to acknowledge that there was a commemorative service out on the front lawn of Queen's Park today. With the Canadian Congress of Ukrainians, we in the New Democratic Party add our voices to all of those of Ukrainian decent and all of those who are concerned about civil rights and human welfare for this Saturday, November 22.

DEFIBRILLATION EQUIPMENT

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm pleased to stand in the House today and recognize the “thousand defibrillators” program launched by the Heart and Stroke Foundation last Friday. I attended the installation of another of these defibrillators at the Kiwanis seniors centre. The centre received one of the 20 defibrillators distributed throughout London.

The McGuinty government is providing \$3 million towards this project and distributing 1,000 defibrillators across Ontario to recreation centre facilities.

I want to tell you, approximately 6,500 people in Ontario suffer from cardiac arrest outside hospitals, with 20% of all cases occurring outside the home. These devices are a great resource for the people of Ontario because they can improve the survival rate by 50% when combined with CPR.

At this event, I met with seniors from the London community who were pleased with the initiative, and also representatives from the city of London, from Fanshawe College, from the EMS society. All these people welcomed the initiative because it's a great way to save lives and protect people.

This is one of many ways the government of Ontario is improving the lives of citizens. We are committed to working hand in hand with people to ensure they are living healthy and productive lives.

I wish you all the luck, and I thank all the people from London who participated in this event.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Ontario, the land of my birth,
For decades the centre of fortune and mirth,
Where hard work and sacrifice defined our self-worth,
Where none could imagine dependence and dearth.

It still looks familiar but in status it's changed,
From "have" to "have-not," our role rearranged,
From the core of the country, our position's ex-
changed,
Now near the bottom, the fisc'ly estranged.

What is their plan to make the pain stop?
What bills on the books to avoid further drop?
What bold new ideas will put us back at the top?
What reprieve from the damage of the five-point flop?

Nothing new, says the Premier, just continuous blame,
Just the same old McGuinty publicity game,
More taxes for all, more bans to proclaim,
And phony debates that make critics cry "shame!"

More smiles for cameras, more smug condescending,
More wasteful bureaucratic spending,
More government hands overextending,
Everywhere but in sectors that really need mending.

They won't listen to reason, they don't answer our
questions,
They refuse to admit their unending obsession,
With spending announcements that march out in pro-
cession,
Along the dark road that leads straight t'wards re-
cession.

They have left us exposed and economically prone,
Through short-sighted vision and mistakes all their
own,
They still only blame others, abdicating their throne,
Ontario, now we stand alone.

FRONTLINES

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I rise in the House today to bring attention to our youth and to how important it is to

provide them with a positive and safe place in the community. One such place is Frontlines, an organization with strong ties to the community of Weston in the riding of York South-Weston that I represent.

The centre, which first opened its doors 20 years ago, offers a variety of activities, including English as a second language classes, a homework club and a special cooking class. Under the direction of Kristy Grisdale, Frontlines staff and volunteers build genuine relationships with each and every person who walks through their door.

This government understands that it is organizations such as Frontlines that create a safe space for children and youth. That is why it established the youth challenge fund in partnership with the United Way. The province of Ontario has invested \$15 million and provided another \$15 million, in matching dollars for the fund. These matching funds have been set up to encourage donations from the private sector and individuals, bringing the total potential investment to \$45 million over three years.

Frontlines serves as a prime example of the good investments which have been made by the youth challenge fund, and I look forward to more investments in our children and our youth.

CHILD PROTECTION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: In recognition of National Child Day and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, I will be introducing this afternoon the Children's Safety and Protection Rights Act.

As a society, we've unfortunately moved beyond only protecting Ontario's most vulnerable kids. Today, even children in stable loving homes need greater protection from the dangers on our streets, and that's why this bill includes sweeping measures that speak to families across the province, including my own.

In fact, Chatham-Kent police told the Chatham Daily News earlier this week that studies show that the reported cases of child abuse only represent 10% of the actual abuse cases in Canada. That's why the measures I propose will expand awareness and education opportunities for youth, in terms of prevention; enhance accountability and transparency in our existing systems; and build in more tools for parents and the justice system.

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I'd like to thank Agnes Samler, Charlie Coffey, Les Horne and Audrey Rastin, and our provincial child advocate, Irwin Elman, for joining me this morning and for all their tireless work on behalf of Ontario's children.

I'd also like to thank Tim Hudak, Christine Elliott and Sylvia Jones for their efforts and their support of this bill. Above all, I would like to thank Megan Boyle and Jad Haffar, on my staff, who made this bill a reality.

I appeal to all members of the Legislative Assembly to put aside their team jerseys and political ideologies for the greater protection of children and youth in this province.

WILLIAM OSLER HEALTH CENTRE

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I rise today to recognize a transformational gift that was announced last Friday night at the William Osler Health Centre Foundation gala. Metrus Development pledged a total of \$10 million to the Brampton Civic Hospital. I'm told that this donation is one of the largest private donations ever given to a non-teaching community hospital in Ontario.

Mr. DeGasperis and Mr. Muzzo from Metrus have always taken a leadership role in our community, being one of the largest land developers in Brampton. This donation, though, demonstrates their commitment to more than bricks and mortar. They're valuable contributors to the social fabric within the communities they build.

To recognize the generosity of these families, the William Osler Health Centre has named its expansive three-storey-tall atrium in the hospital the DeGasperis and Muzzo Atrium.

I'd like to take this time to thank Mr. DeGasperis and Mr. Muzzo and the entire Metrus family for their generous gift. This gift has paved the way for other business leaders to join them in investing in essential health services and ensures that Brampton remains the envy of other municipalities.

Nothing is more important to a community than its hospital. Clearly, Metrus Development shares our government's opinion that this state-of-the-art facility has a very bright future. Soon, the foundation's fundraising goal, which was once thought of as unachievable, is within striking distance, thanks to the support of companies like Metrus—they and other community leaders who believe in this hospital, the people who work there and the kind of care they will provide for decades to come.

REMEMBRANCE DAY CEREMONY

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Last week during constituency week, I was pleased to once again attend a number of Remembrance Day ceremonies in my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore to commemorate and honour those fallen heroes who gave their lives for our country and for peace around the world.

One such ceremony took place at David Hornell Junior School, built in 1961 and named after World War II flying ace and posthumous Victoria Cross recipient, Flight Lieutenant David Hornell.

David Hornell grew up in the Mimico neighbourhood in my riding, so Remembrance Day at his school has always been a very special occasion to honour David's memory.

This year's service included three former principals and two superintendents, veterans from my riding's Royal Canadian Legions, as well as a cadet guard. The students of David Hornell Junior School, in song, presented thoughts about the futility of war and the importance of peace, both in their own lives and throughout the world.

Principal Virginia Field shared the significance of the RCAF sweetheart pin she wore, handed down by her mother, who had received it from her father, Arthur Field, an RCAF officer who in fact knew David Hornell's brother Bill.

David Hornell Junior School serves a diverse population of students, many of them new Canadians experiencing their first link with Canadian culture. Through this wonderful annual remembrance, as well as a memorabilia gallery within the school, students learn about this local hero and acquire a sense of what the war meant within their own community 75 years ago. They also understand the sacrifices that brave young men and women like David Hornell made for our future peace and prosperity.

NDP LEADERSHIP

Mr. Jim Brownell: Last Friday, my riding was graced with a visit by the candidates vying for the leadership of the provincial NDP. They were kind enough to share their opinions of my performance, although they neglected to mention the fact that through my advocacy working with the government, our hospital boards, community and union leaders, we now have three hospital redevelopment projects under way, not to mention a new hospice and a new community health centre.

I have always believed it important to work with my partners, both here at Queen's Park and in the riding, to foster a positive relationship and achieve a positive result for all parties involved. It is a hallmark of this government to do away with the animosity of the past and build a better future for Ontario with our partners. That is our vision.

I think it is important for me to share with the viewers at home what vision the NDP leadership contenders have in mind for Ontario. In one fell swoop, they disparaged the local city council, of which one councillor is president of the local NDP association; had biting remarks for the hospital board that has worked hard to ensure that redevelopment happens; and inflamed a situation that I and others have been trying to resolve in a rational manner.

I never thought I would have cause to make this comparison, but it seems that the NDP want to take Ontario back to the days of Mike Harris, creating division between parties in the province, when our work could be accomplished in so many other, good ways.

Personally, I will continue to work in a positive manner with all my stakeholders, delivering real, positive—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

ANNUAL REPORT, CHIEF MEDICAL
OFFICER OF HEALTH

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that today I have laid upon the table the 2007 annual report of the chief medical officer of health.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CHILDREN'S SAFETY AND PROTECTION RIGHTS ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES DROITS DES ENFANTS EN MATIÈRE DE SÉCURITÉ ET DE PROTECTION

Ms. MacLeod moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 130, An Act to amend various Acts related to the safety and protection of children / *Projet de loi 130, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui a trait à la sécurité et à la protection des enfants.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

It's carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Mr. Speaker, I will beg your indulgence, because it is quite a lengthy act and there are several things I will have to read from the explanatory note.

The bill amends various acts in relation to children. Currently, Christopher's Law (Sex Offender Registry), 2000, requires individuals convicted of certain sexual offences to register with the police. The bill amends the act to provide for a child abuse registry which will be available to the public. The child abuse registry will contain information about persons who have committed sexual and other violent acts against children. The title of the act is changed to Christopher's Law (Sex Offender and Child Abuse Registries).

The bill amends the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, to prohibit advertising that contains images of a sexual nature to a person who is or appears to be under the age of 16. The act is also amended to prohibit advertising that is directed at persons 16 years of age or under that contains clothing, images or other material that encourages sexual activity or creates sexual awareness.

The bill amends the Education Act to establish November 20 in each year as Children's Day in schools and the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

The act is amended to require principals, teachers and all other board employees to report incidents of violence or abuse committed against a student to the student's parents, the school board, the police and, where the child is receiving services from a children's aid society, the society. The act is also amended to prohibit the use of corporal punishment on students.

The bill amends the Ombudsman Act to allow the Ombudsman to investigate any decision or recommendation made, or any act done or omitted, in the course of

the administration of a children's aid society, a school board or hospital.

The Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007, is amended to allow the advocate to provide advocacy to students in schools and to children in hospitals.

The act is also amended to require the advocate to report annually to the Legislative Assembly on the implementation by Ontario of the principles expressed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The provisions related to a show-cause hearing in section 150 of the Provincial Offences Act are amended in respect of defendants charged with child abuse offences under the Child and Family Services Act.

In these types of cases, detention and custody may be justified to ensure the defendant's appearance in court, to protect the public safety or to maintain confidence in the administration of justice. Also, in these types of cases, an order for release may be conditional upon the defendant abstaining from communicating with any victim, witness or other person identified in the order.

ONTARIO ENERGY BOARD AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA COMMISSION DE L'ÉNERGIE DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. Ramsay moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 131, An Act to amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 with respect to retailers of electricity and gas marketers / *Projet de loi 131, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario à l'égard des détaillants d'électricité et des agents de commercialisation de gaz.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

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Mr. David Ramsay: This proposed bill would provide improved consumer protection from predatory door-to-door electricity and natural gas retailers. This bill is a result of dealing with hundreds of cases in my constituency where people have lost their power and, in some cases, have had their children taken away because they could no longer heat their home. By selling consumers higher-cost energy as well as triggering cancellation fees on existing contracts, consumers are incurring debt, which often leads to the disconnection of service. This, in turn, leads to deposits having to be required when reconnection of service comes afterwards. In many cases, our social service agencies have had to intervene on behalf of clients, causing undue financial stress on government coffers.

This bill, if passed, would require retailers of energy and marketers of gas to provide a reaffirmation letter to the consumer that must be signed and returned to the

retailer. This letter would have to have the new cost, the present cost, the cancellation fee, if any, to the consumer, and also what they could get from the utility.

The last thing it's also going to do, if passed, is ban the allowing of retailers entering people into contracts upon cashing of a cheque that they receive through direct mail contact.

LIQUOR LICENCE AMENDMENT ACT (FRUIT WINE), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES PERMIS D'ALCOOL (VIN DE FRUITS)

Mr. Runciman moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 132, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act /
Projet de loi 132, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les permis
d'alcool.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The bill amends the Liquor Licence Act to establish a licence to enable manufacturers of fruit wine to sell the fruit wine at farmers' markets if the fruit wine meets the standards for sale at government stores.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Peter Shurman: I have a petition from the students at York University.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the strike by CUPE Local 3903 at York University has resulted in classes being cancelled, affecting more than 50,000 students across the greater Toronto area; and

"Whereas the members of CUPE Local 3903 show an unwillingness to bargain in good faith and bring an end to this strike; and

"Whereas York University has offered to resolve this labour dispute through binding arbitration;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Enact back-to-work legislation requiring the termination of any strike or lockout action and requiring this labour dispute to be resolved through binding arbitration."

I fully support this petition, I affix my name to it, and will give it to page Brittney.

POVERTY

Mr. Rosario Marchese: This petition is addressed to the Premier of Ontario.

"We, the undersigned, are writing to ask that the province of Ontario's proposed poverty reduction strategy include measures to address the extreme poverty faced by many single adults and couples without children in our community.

"A single adult on social assistance living in Toronto must now survive on \$560 a month, yet the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Toronto is more than \$919. Adults without children must be given the same opportunities under the plan as adults who live with children in poverty."

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. Mike Colle: This petition is from the Eglinton Flats social club.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the federal government gives more support for economic development, health care and infrastructure to other parts of Canada, and unemployed workers in Ontario get less employment insurance support than in other parts of Canada;

"Whereas the federal system of taxes and equalization extracts over \$20 billion from the people of Ontario every year above and beyond what Ottawa invests in Ontario;

"Whereas laid-off workers in Ontario get \$4,630 less in employment insurance than they would get if they lived in another part of Canada;

"Whereas federal health care money is supposed to be divided equally ..." yet "Ontario residents are short-changed by \$773 million per year;

"Whereas the federal government provides economic development support for people living in" other parts of Canada but none in southern Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that the federal government stop gouging the people of Ontario and treat them fairly."

I support the petition, and I'll affix my name to it.

TUITION

Mr. Jim Wilson: To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario have increased by 195% since 1990 and are the third-highest in all of the provinces in Canada; and

"Whereas average student debt in Ontario has skyrocketed by 250% in the last 15 years to over \$25,000 for four years of study; and

"Whereas international students pay three to four times more for the same education, and domestic students in professional programs such as law or medicine pay as much tuition as \$20,000 per year; and

"Whereas 70% of new jobs require post-secondary education, and fees reduce the opportunity for many low- and middle-income families while magnifying barriers for aboriginal, rural, racialized and other marginalized students; and

"Whereas Ontario currently provides the lowest per capita funding for post-secondary education in Canada, while many countries fully fund higher education and charge little or no fees for college and university; and

"Whereas public opinion polls show that nearly three quarters of Ontarians think the government's Reaching Higher framework for tuition fee increases of 20% to 36% over four years is unfair;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students' call to immediately drop tuition fees to 2004 levels and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to introduce a new framework that:

"(1) Reduces tuition and ancillary fees annually for" all "students.

"(2) Converts a portion of every student loan into a grant.

"(3) Increases per student funding above the national average."

I agree with this petition—it's asking to lower tuition fees to Mike Harris levels—and I certainly will sign it.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents.

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act" as above "to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I'll sign it and send it to the Clerk's table.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the current Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital is fully utilized; and

"Whereas Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital was sized to serve a town of Oakville population of 130,000, and the current population is now well over 170,000; and

"Whereas the population of Oakville continues to grow as mandated by 'Places to Grow,' an act of the Ontario Legislature, and is projected to be 187,500" people "in 2012, the completion date for a new facility in the original time frame; and

"Whereas residents of the town of Oakville are entitled to" have access to "the same quality of health care as all Ontarians; and

"Whereas hospital facilities in the surrounding area do not have capacity to absorb Oakville's overflow needs;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure the new Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital be completed under its original timelines without further delay."

I agree with the petition. I'm glad to sign it and pass it to the page.

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SEXUAL REASSIGNMENT SURGERY

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the previous Progressive Conservative government determined sex change operations were not a medical spending priority and instead chose to invest in essential health care services; and

"Whereas Premier McGuinty said in 2004 that funding for sex change operations was not a priority of his government; and

"Whereas the current Liberal government has eliminated and reduced OHIP coverage for chiropractic, optometry and physiotherapy services; and

"Whereas the present shortage of doctors and nurses, troubling waiting times for emergency services and other treatment, operational challenges at many hospitals, as well as a crisis in our long-term-care homes signify the current government has not met their health care commitments;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario does not fund sex change operations under OHIP and instead concentrates its priorities on essential health services and directs our health care resources to improve patient care for Ontarians."

Since I was the health minister who got rid of the sex change operation funding, I certainly agree with this petition, and I will sign it.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario about Milton District Hospital.

“Whereas Milton District Hospital was designed to serve a population of 30,000 and the town of Milton is now home to more than 69,000 people and is still growing rapidly; and

“Whereas the town of Milton is the fastest-growing town in Canada and was forced into that rate of growth by an act of the Ontario Legislature called ‘Places to Grow’; and

“Whereas the town of Milton is projected to have a population of 101,600 people in 2014, which is the earliest date an expansion could be completed; and

“Whereas the current Milton facility is too small to accommodate Milton’s explosive growth and parts of the hospital prohibit the integration of new outpatient clinics and diagnostic technologies;

“Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure timely approval and construction of the expansion to Milton District Hospital.”

I agree with this petition, and I’m pleased to sign my name to it and pass it to my page.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with Bill 119, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act.

“Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 119, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008, which makes WSIB mandatory for independent operators, partners and executive officers in construction; and

“Whereas this bill will cost the average business owner about \$11,000 while doing nothing to catch cheaters in the underground economy; and

“Whereas this bill will do nothing to make workers safer in the workplace; and

“Whereas there has been insufficient consultation with construction companies and stakeholders to discuss the impact of this bill or other alternatives; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government refuses to allow discussion of this bill with the affected parties through the committee process;

“Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To revoke Bill 119 or to require the Standing Committee on Social Policy to travel across the province of

Ontario in order to provide an opportunity for consultation with affected businesses.”

I support this petition.

BEER RETAILING AND DISTRIBUTION

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the current system, practice and arrangement of retailing and distributing beer in the province of Ontario—and more specifically, the ‘near monopoly’ of The Beer Store—severely restricts the accessibility, convenience and choice for retail consumers of beer in Ontario; and

“Whereas The Beer Store ‘near monopoly’ is controlled by ‘for-profit, foreign-owned companies’ and these companies are not accountable to the people of Ontario, and these companies do not act in the best interests of the people of Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That legislation be introduced that will permit the retailing and distribution of beer through alternative and additional grocery and supermarket retail channels that will fairly compete with The Beer Store, thereby allowing an accessible, convenient, safe, well-regulated and environmentally responsible retailing environment for beer to become established in the province of Ontario.”

I agree with the petition, I sign my name, and I pass it to my page Courtney.

LOGGING ROUTE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with logging through the village of Restoule.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Nipissing forest management plan proposes to use Hawthorne Drive in Restoule, which features a single-lane bridge and narrow and steep sections; and

“Whereas area residents have grave concerns about community safety, traffic speed, truck noise and general wear and tear of Hawthorne Drive and the bridge in the village of Restoule; and

“Whereas the proposed route travels past the Restoule Canadian Legion and two churches; and

“Whereas alternative routes are possible via Odorizzi Road and Block 09-056;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the government of Ontario put the safety and concerns of the people of Restoule ahead of logging interests and ensure an alternate route is selected for the Nipissing forest management plan.”

I support this petition.

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Mr. Jim Wilson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the current journeymen tradespeople to apprenticeship ratios in the manufacturing and construction sectors in Ontario are both outdated and unfair; and

“Whereas the ratio of journeymen ... to apprenticeship in many other jurisdictions in Canada is already one to one; and

“Whereas the current journeymen ... to apprenticeship ratios put small and medium-sized businesses in Ontario requiring skilled trades at a disadvantage to other provinces; and

“Whereas MPP Laurie Scott and MPP Garfield Dunlop have both brought forward notices of motion requesting the government and the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities to make the necessary regulatory changes to current ratios;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately make the necessary regulatory changes to accommodate the construction and manufacturing trades so that the ratio of journeymen tradespeople to apprentices be one to one.”

I agree with this, and I've signed it.

EMERGENCY DISPATCH SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with emergency communication services in Parry Sound–Muskoka. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is considering relocating emergency ambulance and fire dispatch services currently provided by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service to the city of Barrie; and

“Whereas up to 40% of all calls received are from cellphones from people unfamiliar with the area; and

“Whereas Parry Sound–Muskoka residents have grave concerns about the effect on emergency response times if dispatch services are provided by dispatchers who are not familiar with the area; and

“Whereas 16 Ministry of Health and Long-Term-Care-funded jobs, held by qualified communication officers from local communities, may be lost as a result of the relocation of dispatch services to the city of Barrie,

“Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the government of Ontario put the safety, health and economic concerns of the people of Parry Sound–Muskoka ahead of government efficiency interests and ensure that emergency dispatch services continue to be provided locally by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service.”

I support this petition.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Jim Wilson: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the McGuinty government must increase immediately the number of long-term-care—nursing homes, homes for the aged, charitable homes—beds in the county of Simcoe and Grey so as to eliminate the waiting lists of people who can no longer stay in their own homes and/or are stuck inappropriately in a hospital bed through no fault of their own.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the 19,000 seniors in my riding of Simcoe–Grey who make up 15% of the population of my constituency. A rising number of these seniors are growing increasingly dependent on services funded in large part by the province of Ontario to allow them to live with comfort and dignity in their elder years.

Before I get too far into my remarks, I want to acknowledge and thank the people who fulfill both administrative and front-line duties in my local nursing homes. I visit nursing homes regularly in my riding, and I know that the staff makes every effort to make life comfortable and pleasant for the residents in their care. I must salute Ed Ozimek and family, and the staff who operate Errinrunc Nursing Home in Thornbury; Karen Milligan and all the staff at Bay Haven Nursing Home in Collingwood; Peter and Robert Zober and their staff at Collingwood Nursing Home; Paula Rentner, the administrator, and Sherry Lee, the director of nursing, and their employees at Creedan Valley Nursing Home in Creemore; Lorraine Baker and the workers at Stayner Nursing Home; all the staff at the county of Simcoe who operate Simcoe Manor in Beeton and Sunset Manor in Collingwood; the terrific people, like Karen Locke, who is the programs manager, at Sara Vista Nursing Centre in Elmvale; and of course Linda Weaver and all the great people at Good Samaritan Nursing Home in Alliston.

I could use up my entire 12 minutes naming all the nursing home staff who have been so very kind to me over the years and who provide such excellent care to their residents, but I'll stop here because I want to get to the point of my resolution being debated this afternoon.

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Without question, long-term care is one of the biggest issues that I deal with in my constituency offices. That's partly why I'm so familiar with all of the homes and the staff and residents in them. There is such a huge waiting list to get into local homes that most seniors are forced to travel out of their own home communities to find space. In fact, it's so bad that one of the attending physicians—and he's been an attending physician for over 14 years—in one of our local nursing homes can't even get his wife,

who is stuck in Collingwood hospital, a bed in that home. So many pleas for assistance and complaints about the lengthy waiting lists have come into my offices that I took it upon myself to write to the Minister of Health to plea for urgent action to build more beds in my riding. Sadly, the response last April from the former minister, Mr. Smitherman, was less than pleasing.

He wrote: "My father's experience reminds me to always keep the issue of dignity and respect when it comes to providing our most frail and vulnerable with the care they need. I agree with your constituents on taking steps to ensure that seniors are getting the care they deserve." While I agree with that, the minister unfortunately went on to tell me about a number of government initiatives that don't relate to building any new beds in my riding. So here we are today.

I suspect that some of the government members will get up during this debate and say to the people watching at home in my riding, "Don't worry, we've got a few beds on the go in Midland and a few more in Barrie." But that doesn't do much good because those beds are outside of my riding, which doesn't help my constituents very much at all.

Obviously, those responses are discouraging for me, and the seniors and their families whom I've been trying to help. Seniors deserve to be cared for as close to home as possible. Family members who are able to lend a hand with the care of their loved ones often find it impossible to travel long distances on a regular basis to provide care, love and support. They worry about the emotional well-being of their loved ones when they are so far away from home, and the support network they need. I certainly understand that and can speak from my own experience. Many of you know that my father passed away last month. Had he been able to hold on much longer, then there is no doubt that he would have had to go into a nursing home for around-the-clock care. The closest, I think, we could have got him a nursing home bed was in Orangeville or perhaps Newmarket. My father lived with my mother in their home in Alliston, and I don't know how we would have gotten mom out to see dad in Orangeville or Newmarket if that's where he had had to go. I live in Wasaga Beach, but I'm also required to be here in Toronto at Queen's Park during the week. My sister lives in Barrie and travels extensively in her job, as does her husband, John Spencer. My brother Joe and his wife, Catherine, live in Woodbridge and my older brother John and his wife, Ing, live in Buffalo. I don't know how we could have done it, and I really do sympathize with those who have to travel those long distances on such a regular basis just to see and care for loved ones since there aren't enough supports available in their own home communities.

The current critical shortage of beds is, I must say, in stark contrast to my days in government when we approved over \$2.1 billion of new money to build 20,000 nursing home beds or long-term-care beds and to rebuild the 16,000 beds found in the province's oldest facilities. We were building so many beds back then that the oppo-

sition Liberals at the time criticized us often for over-building. But the need was really there, much like it is today, because in 1995, when the Progressive Conservatives came to office, we found that no new long-term-care beds had been built in this province since 1987. Now we are starting to slide back to where we were in 1987, and we certainly shouldn't allow that to happen.

The fact is, Ontario's long-term-care facilities are 99.9% full 100% of the time, and that statistic certainly rings true in my riding. For example, in the North Simcoe-Muskoka catchment area, which is huge—it runs from Maxwell and Feversham all the way over to Brechin and up to Penetanguishene and Huntsville, and in my riding it includes Collingwood, Clearview, Essa, Springwater and Wasaga Beach—there are 1,700 people waiting on the list for a long-term-care bed. If you live in central region, which is also huge, it runs from Glencairn down to Hockley and Woodbridge and over to Markham and up to Keswick, and in my riding it includes New Tecumseth and Adjala-Tosorontio. In this catchment area, there are 2,225 people on a list for a nursing home bed. While those are some pretty astonishing waiting lists, they don't necessarily reflect the true picture of the waiting lists at my local homes.

Let's look at Simcoe Manor in Beeton. There are currently 124 people waiting to get in there, while another 85 are anxiously awaiting admission to Good Samaritan nursing home in Alliston. Looking north to Collingwood, there are 108 individuals on the waiting list at Bay Haven and there's a minimum of 45 people in the same boat, trying to get into the Collingwood Nursing Home, and another 45 waiting to get into the Stayner Nursing Home, and an additional 60 who are attempting to get a spot in Elmvale at Sara Vista.

Over in Grey county, at Errinrunc Nursing Home in Thornbury, there are eight people waiting for a bed, which may sound low until you consider that that's a waiting list of at least three months. While these numbers are always fluctuating, in Grey Bruce alone, there are about 300 people waiting for a nursing home bed, either just to get in or for a more private room, which can translate into at least six- to 12-month waiting times in the Grey Bruce area alone.

It's not that these nursing homes don't want to expand and provide more beds; they do. One local home told me that they could easily double in size and still remain full, but each time they try to get additional beds, they're turned down. One home even told me they tried to enter into an agreement to assist area hospitals by alleviating their alternative level of care bed issues, and they were just ignored by the ministry and given the feeling that they need not bother to even try to help out.

You can see that if we don't increase the capacity locally, we're going to continue to have individuals who are in alternative level of care beds in hospitals—they used to call them "bed blockers." Through no fault of their own, these people will still be stuck in hospital. I understand there are some 450 in my riding who are stuck in hospitals. That also includes Barrie and Orillia

hospitals that are just outside of my riding but serve my constituents. This isn't good for those elderly people; most of them are very, very elderly. They don't get any programs in the hospital because the nurses don't have time to play bridge with them or socialize with them. They're literally stuck there, in many cases, without the programming that is available in our nursing homes and the tender, loving care that nursing homes are so wonderfully known for in this province.

If we don't get help soon in my riding—and this debate, in principle, is for everybody's riding here, so I hope you'll support it—people in my riding are going to continue to have to try to get into Orangeville, Newmarket, Markham or Huntsville, and that's clogging up someone else's riding. We need to build new beds. It's a serious, serious matter; it's becoming one of the largest issues in my riding. It certainly was in the campaign last year, and I pledged to do what I could. I've been doing it quietly behind the scenes and talking with the ministry and writing the minister, so far to no avail.

I will conclude by imploring the members of this House to support this very simple resolution that merely calls upon the government to act on behalf of the seniors in my riding and, as I said, the seniors in your riding too, who are growing increasingly dependent on the services funded in part by the province to allow them to live with comfort and dignity in their elder years.

Let us resolve today to do our best as legislators to bring hope to those on the waiting lists for long-term-care beds, who need our help and who are asking us to do the right thing and support this resolution. I implore all members to set your partisanship aside to build some nursing home beds since the 20,000 that were built or started construction under our government. You will get up, I'm sure, in your debate, and claim 8,000. I heard that in some debate last week. Those are beds that Elizabeth Witmer announced as Minister of Health. You were just finishing off what we had already announced and started to build. You've not been able to claim any new builds for yourselves. Get up today, support this resolution and encourage your Minister of Health, your Premier and your finance minister. Even though it's tough times, the elderly deserve our support, and they need to be a priority. Even if it is tough times, you still have a record budget of \$96 billion, \$98 billion, up 26% since you came to office. Surely that money should have been put into long-term-care beds and dignity and respect for our elderly.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm happy to be here to support this resolution. Clearly, there is a need for long-term-care beds all over the province and in particular, in this member's riding, where 1,500 people are waiting for long-term-care beds. So the need is there. Across the province, I think we're short—22,000 people are waiting for long-term care. So it's a need.

Is that the only answer to the problem of what we need to do with senior citizens? I say no. We have to look at

something else. We have to look at better ways to take care of our seniors. In the next 10, 15 years, we're going to have more and more seniors to take care of—unlike what we've ever seen before.

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I've got to tell you, I for one don't want to be in a long-term-care facility if I can avoid it and I'm going to do my best to avoid it as long as I possibly can. When you read the articles, whether they're in the *Toronto Star* or the *Globe* or other papers, on how seniors live in long-term-care facilities, I quite frankly don't want to be in one of them. If I have the money, I'm going to try to get the best possible care, and at home if I can.

Those who have \$4,000 or \$5,000 a month to be able to be in a nice long-term-care facility, God bless—but those of us who are normal human beings can't afford that kind of care. Those who've got the pecunia will be okay. Those who happen to be rich—and there are a few of them in this place—will be okay. But the majority of humble MPPs are going to have to worry about our care.

So, as I say to you, we need to look at many, many issues connected to the care of seniors.

That's why I, along with the current Speaker and many other members, including Cheri DiNovo from Parkdale-High Park, have been speaking about the need to have the Ombudsman get in those facilities and check them out and do a report and embarrass us all—not just this government, but each and every one of the MPPs—about how seniors live in those homes. I, for one, want Monsieur Marin to get into those long-term-care facilities and check them out, because he would reveal, as he has revealed on any other matter that he has investigated, that there are serious problems that need to be addressed. I know that governments are very wary when they're in there. When they're in opposition, it's a different story. When they're in government, they say, "We can't have a person like Monsieur Marin embarrass us." I understand that. But if he reveals problems that each and every one of us, no matter which political party we belong to—problems about the care of seniors, we should all care, and we should all be moving fast to address those problems. This Liberal government has denied every initiative brought forth by Andrea Horwath, the member for Hamilton Centre, on the need to have the Ombudsman do a proper investigation of long-term-care facilities, something that he has been calling for for a long time, something that every other province across Canada can do. Yet, every time we ask, every time we push this government, they say no. It's an embarrassment. We need to know. We already know, but it would be nice to have Monsieur Marin finally confirm it once and for all for all of us.

We know they need more care. That's why we New Democrats have been pushing for 3.5 hours of daily care in order to be able to give them a little extra time.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The member from London-Fanshawe says, "We are doing that." No, you're not. You know it, they know it. Everyone seems to know it.

Everyone seems to know it except every Liberal who wants to deny it.

More care is essential. Better care would be better.

I don't want to live in one of those places. If you look at the kind of food they serve these poor seniors, that would be one reason why I wouldn't want to be a senior in one of these places.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: You can't drink wine with dinner.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: And evidently, whereas in Sweden and Denmark you can have your glass of wine at the dinner table, here you can't. If you want a glass of wine, maybe they'll bring it to you in your room, but you've got to ask. Imagine, you can't have a glass of wine if you're a senior.

If you are a senior citizen in one of these buildings, what do you think you get? You get more drugs than you'll ever get glasses of wine. They drug you till you drop. Seniors are overmedicated. Sure, we need more spots, but you've got to look at the care that you get. I don't want any drugs in my system. I try to avoid them as much as I can, because I believe the side effects from those drugs kill us, and nobody seems to care about that.

I read the stories presented by Judy Steed in the Toronto Star, a good series of five long articles about what they're doing in other places—innovation in how you take care of seniors. She discovered that there are some great things happening, not here, not in Canada but in other countries.

We always look to America as our comparator. Why would we look to America as the only comparator of any good stuff that happens? The good stuff doesn't happen there, and it's not happening here. It's happening, yes, in Sweden and Denmark, the best places to grow old. If I've got a couple of bucks, I'd rather go there and have a glass of wine than be here and be drugged to death.

I'm looking forward to the day when we have a government that has a little bit of a—but I've got to tell you, most of us are in our 50s. We've got to worry. You have to worry. There are a lot of Liberals who are over 50. You should be worried about this.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I know; me too. We should be studying innovative ways of keeping ourselves healthy.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Exercise.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Exactly. That's what I'm saying—exercise. There are other things we need to study.

I look at the kinds of things that they're doing in Sweden, and what they say is when these seniors can no longer live at home—because the commitment is to live at home as long as you can; that's where I want to be—they move into small homes that provide a shocking contrast to far too many of the long-term-care facilities we have in Ontario.

This series should be a wake-up call for Ontarians that to adequately respond to what Steed calls the "boomer tsunami," we need innovation and bold policy. She talks about an immediate increase in support of geriatricians.

We have, I believe—I can't recall the number—only five geriatricians here in Ontario. We need people who have an expertise, who understand seniors and propose ways to keep them healthy.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I know. As you get old, you're going to get more tired. If you're tired now, imagine in 10 years from now, and then imagine in 15 years from now, and then imagine the drugs in your system. Just think about that. If you're tired today, think about it. And we have no pension, David; remember that. Think of that.

So we have to have a better understanding of the commitment to the social determinants of health, as we look at what it is we should be doing. We should be talking about physical and mental exercise, which is what they do in Sweden and Norway; a sense of belonging and purpose and community; a rethinking of our home care system, in terms of the supports we should be providing; and a commitment to properly staff the long-term-care facilities.

Look at this quote from Tine Rostgaard, a senior researcher at the Danish National Centre for Social Research and a policy expert in the care of the old people, who emphasizes that "the philosophy of the Danish government is to integrate elderly people, to keep them active in the community as long as possible, to not do things for them when they can do for themselves."

What you read in those articles is that every senior citizen, if they can move, should be active, and if they can be active, they should do everything they can on their own, which includes sweeping if they have to, which includes cooking if they want to, and they do—everything that has to do with keeping this alive and the body active. And they do that.

Mr. Dave Levac: And being at home.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to be at home, David.

They say, "Here at Torndalshave, the mood is light and bright. Partly it's the architecture. The one-storey building is new and modern, with a courtyard garden in the centre. The surrounding inner walls are glass, floor to ceiling. Light pours in. Flowers and tomato plants thrive in the garden, where residents help with gardening."

There are only 12 residents there. We have long-term facilities that are packed to the core, with few workers, who are overworked and underpaid and can't get to address the needs of seniors, and in many of those facilities they have 12 people that they look after.

1400

This is serious stuff. It's serious for us, because that's where most of us are going to be in 15, 20 years, and some of you are close to it already. You've got to worry about this; you have to. We've got to look at staff, along with residents. We've got to be innovative; we have to. We can't just keep on going the way we have.

Yes, member from Simcoe-Grey, I support your motion—it's fine—but we've got to look at other ways to keep seniors healthy. Maybe you'll speak to that in the time remaining. But as I support that motion, I am telling

you that we've got to do so much more to keep ourselves healthy, as we and more and more people age in the next 10, 15 years.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I want to start by expressing, on my behalf and on behalf of many of my colleagues, condolences to my friend opposite on the loss of his father. I know that his dad would be watching him very much as he debates and talks about this important issue in all of our communities.

I know that the member from Simcoe-Grey has the best interests of his community at heart as he raises this issue, as we all do when we visit homes in our communities, when we work with those organizations that support seniors to help them stay in their own homes, and as we do bring innovative thinking, especially in light of our aging population.

A number of years ago when I was first elected to this Legislature, at the time of a number of very deplorable and unacceptable stories being out in the media with respect to the care being given to seniors in various communities across the province, I attended the homes in my community, unannounced and unexpected, to observe and have an understanding of what life was like in those homes across my community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore. I have to say that I was so proud to go into organizations like Lakeshore Lodge, Wesburn Manor, Ivan Franko or Labdara and see, on that occasion and on many occasions since, the wonderful care that is given to seniors who, by the choice of them and their families, have decided to spend the remaining days of their lives or a portion of their lives in seniors' homes across the province.

In those homes, there are many, many new kinds of thinking being brought to bear. I can contrast the modern homes that have been built in my community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore, such as Wesburn Manor—it has that central courtyard and a great deal of activities, exercises, cultural organizations and much diversity of choice for the residents of the home. I contrast that with, as a young child, visiting my grandfather in the home he lived in and think that in those instances there was very limited individualism brought to allow individuals to make decisions with respect to their own lives and life circumstances, to give them privacy and dignity when they could no longer live in their own homes.

My grandfather passed away a number of years ago. My grandmother, still living in Saskatchewan at 88 years old, lives independently in her own apartment. I think she, like so many other seniors, is very appreciative, and what they want is to be able to live in their own homes.

For me, as a member of this government, one of the things we're doing that I think is a critical health care investment is the investments we've made that will allow people to live in their own homes and the investments we've made in home care. The groundbreaking aging at home strategy, which will help us meet the needs of our aging population, is a \$1.1-billion strategy over four years. It will provide support and services to seniors to

allow them to stay in their own homes with dignity and independence. It is part of our strategy to reduce ER wait times by increasing home care hours, personal support and home-making services.

The organizations in my community, such as Storefront Humber and Etobicoke Services for Seniors as two wonderful examples—when I have an opportunity to speak to those care providers and personal support workers, what I say to them is, I thank them for the love that they provide to individuals in all of our lives to whom we would like to be able to provide that level of support. But because of our lives, the responsibilities that we each may have with respect to care of our own children, our own profession, our work life, families depend on others to provide loving, compassionate care to allow seniors to be able to live for as long as they want in their own homes. It makes a significant difference, the amount of funding and resources available in terms of home care investments. That's something that I'm very proud of that we have done as a government.

I also want to speak briefly to what we have done with respect to long-term-care homes. It is important to note on the floor of this Legislature and in the context of this debate that we've increased funding for LTC by over \$1 billion, or 50%. It has increased by \$300 million in this year alone. We've opened 7,712 new long-term-care beds. We have invested, this summer, \$23.5 million for 873 personal support workers. Those investments make a concrete difference in terms of the bed space available in long-term-care homes when that is the choice that the family makes with respect to where and how they will care for those who are aging in their family, and the investments in home care actually allow them to have options and to be able to determine if they choose as a family that those aging should stay in their own homes.

In the community of Simcoe-Grey, I understand that it is a growing part of our province and that there are some challenges with respect to the immediate capacity in long-term-care beds, but I do know that since 2003 we've added 242 new long-term-care beds to serve the riding of Simcoe-Grey and area. In June of this year, we began building a 160-bed long-term-care home in Barrie that will also serve the residents of Simcoe-Grey, with the first admission expected to be in February 2010. In 2007, we announced a \$7.2-million investment to allow for the construction of 96 new beds in Bradford Valley, slated to open in 2009. We've increased funding to the Collingwood General and Marine Hospital by nearly 40% since 2003. Those are just some of the investments that will benefit the community of Simcoe-Grey.

Is there more to do? Of course. Do we need to see these beds constructed? Obviously, yes. But I think we are moving well forward in innovative thinking with respect to long-term care and the care for those who have come before us.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm very pleased to support the resolution that has been put forward by my colleague

the member for Simcoe–Grey, that the McGuinty government must increase immediately the number of long-term-care—nursing homes, homes for the aged, charitable homes—beds in the counties of Simcoe and Grey so as to eliminate the waiting lists of people who can no longer stay in their own homes and/or are stuck inappropriately in a hospital bed through no fault of their own.

I would like to congratulate my colleague, a former Minister of Health, for his commitment to doing all he can—and he has done so ever since he was our Minister of Health—to ensure that people, in this case particularly those older people, have access to the health services and the living space that they require as they get older. I think he's made the case that, certainly in his community, there is a dire shortage of beds. In fact, there is a dire shortage of beds in the province of Ontario. As of August 31, 2008, we had 24,099 people on long-term-care waiting lists. In my own community of Waterloo–Wellington, there are 1,544.

My colleague has indicated that these people who are older deserve to live with hope and with dignity and certainly in a safe, secure residential environment. We are, unfortunately, today not able to do that. As a result, many of them are being forced to move far from family and far from friends. The quality of life is simply not the same, because those people are not able to receive visits. There's nothing more important in your life than having the opportunity to continue to see family and friends on a regular ongoing basis.

1410

This is an issue that my colleague has raised and that I would say to you has reached crisis proportions. Unfortunately, this government took a holiday when they were first elected. They recognized that we had built 20,000 new long-term-care beds. Those long-term-care beds have been coming on board ever since 2003. This government simply has not, to this day, put a plan in action—a comprehensive, long-term strategic plan—in order to identify where future homes are going to be necessary and then communicate that to the people in the province of Ontario.

The other thing this government has not done is, they have not continued with the rebuilding of the older homes. Although we did rebuild 16,000 homes, as my colleague has mentioned, there are 35,000 seniors today who still live in homes that certainly some of us would be embarrassed of and would have difficulty putting our aging parents into them. They are homes that have three and four beds in a room. They don't have ensuite washrooms. They're not wheelchair accessible.

The one thing I can tell you about long-term-care homes is they have dedicated, hard-working staff, and regardless of the physical environment, anybody I've ever met working in a home has been extremely dedicated and trying to do all they can for the residents. And that's another part of the problem. This government promised \$6,000 in 2003 for additional personal care for each long-term-care resident. I am sad to say today that that \$6,000 has never been delivered, and as a result, we haven't seen

the increase in personal care that's required, because the difference today compared to 10 and even five years ago is that the people in long-term-care homes are older, they are more frail, and they have more complex care needs.

I also want to put on the record the fact that Ontario, today, funds each resident the amount of personal care at a smaller number than Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba and New Brunswick. That's because they didn't keep their 2003 election promise to provide an additional \$6,000 in personal care to each resident. As a result, the long-term-care homes are short-staffed. I probably have more people knocking on the door of my constituency office today than ever, ever before, concerned about the level of care that their loved one is receiving.

As I say, the staff work hard. They simply can't do any more, and there is an immediate need for 4,500 full-time positions this year within the homes to meet the needs. We are looking for an average of three worked hours of personal care per day within a year, and that's not paid hours, because when you talk about paid, that refers to people going out on maternity leave, holidays and everything. What we want and what these people deserve in the homes, and what is absolutely necessary, is to achieve an average of three worked hours of personal care per day this year.

My colleague has correctly identified that we have a serious problem in the province of Ontario. Our older residents certainly deserve to live with dignity, in safety and security. Right now, I can tell you one of the things I hear from my own mother, who's 87, is, "Maybe I should get on some list somewhere because people in our community aren't going where they want to go and they're having to live in homes that are too far away to enable them to keep in touch with family and friends." It is a fear of the elderly today, and I say, "Mom, don't do that. You're still healthy." But it's too bad that the fear is there.

So I applaud my colleague for bringing forward this private member's bill. I applaud his commitment to people in the province of Ontario, which he's always demonstrated, and I hope that all of us will support his resolution.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: First, I want to thank you for allowing me to speak on this very important matter brought forth by the member from Simcoe–Grey. Long-term-care issues in the province of Ontario, especially in his riding of Simcoe–Grey, are important to us. It's always important to speak about this issue wherever we go and especially in this place.

I still remember when we addressed this issue as a government because this issue is important to us. I was a part of the committee that travelled the province of Ontario to listen to many long-term-care facilities and homes and also constituents and people affected by this issue and passionate about it. We learned a lot. I learned a lot on this tour.

The member from Kitchener–Waterloo was with us, and she was listening to all the people who indicated to

the committee back then how they were treated when they were in government, especially when she was Minister of Health. The honourable member from Simcoe-Grey who brought this motion before us today, was a Minister of Health. He is talking about how many long-term beds increased in the province of Ontario, but he does not mention that they were for-profit homes.

It's important to focus on this issue, and I am proud to be a part of the government that put attention and focus on the issue and tried to improve the health of the people, especially when they get old. I remember there was no standard in place when we were discussing this issue. It varied from one long-term-care home to another long-term-care home, but the average was 2.6 hours. We increased it to 3.26 hours, and hopefully by 2011 it will be 3.5 hours. That shows our commitment to this file and shows our commitment to the people who worked hard in their lifetime to build this province, to pay taxes and to give us the chance and ability to live comfortably these days.

As my colleague from Trinity-Spadina mentioned, all of us are getting old. One day we're going to end up in those facilities or homes. We have to create the rules and laws to comfort people today and in the future, because we will be part of the future. It's important to talk about it and, as I mentioned, important to address it. I am pleased to say our government has been working for a long time to address this issue, whether it's increasing the hours for care or increasing nurses and personal support for the people who live in long-term-care homes.

Another component to it is the community care access centre. They're working in conjunction with hospitals, with long-term-care facilities and homes across the province of Ontario to accommodate all these people, to find a place for them where they get the support they need. It's very important to mention today that many people, especially elderly people, don't want to move to long-term-care homes. They prefer to stay home with support from the government or from the communities where they live. They want to stay home among their families. They want to stay in the place they grew up in or built or where they've been living for many different years. That's why the community care access centre facilitates supporting them, gives them the support they need and assists them to remain in their homes, which is better for them, among their families in the place they love and care a lot about.

I think it's an important issue, and I want to commend the member for bringing it to this House. Hopefully it will be addressed in a professional manner. We care about this issue. We have been working since we got elected in 2003. As I mentioned, I had the chance and the privilege to serve on the committee that addressed this issue, had a chance to travel the province of Ontario to educate myself and to learn more about this issue. I had the privilege and honour to speak about this in this House and also to pass a bill to transform the long-term-care homes in the province of Ontario and support our elderly and our seniors, who deserve all our support.

Thank you for allowing me to speak, and I wish the member good luck—and all the people who spoke on this issue, because it is important.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm happy to join the debate of our private members' public business this afternoon, the resolution brought forward by my colleague from Simcoe-Grey to increase the number of long-term-care beds in his counties of Simcoe and Grey. He has certainly been a strong advocate for health care and long-term care in his riding, something he has done for the some 18 years he has been elected—a former Minister of Health—and that's a great record to have.

1420

I remember that in April last year he brought in a private member's resolution with respect to the birthing unit at Stevenson Memorial Hospital, which was being closed down. He had 150 to 200 people from his riding in the galleries supporting his work. He brought the case to the Legislature—petitions, resolutions, debate—and he now has been able to have that birthing unit there helping the women in his local area.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Reopened and better than ever.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Reopened and better than ever. That is a great accomplishment for him and for the people of his riding.

The motion before us today speaks directly to the need for long-term care in all our communities. We're specifically discussing Simcoe and Grey counties, but in all our local communities we certainly have had people come to us with long wait lists for long-term-care beds.

I was nursing for over 20 years and saw what happened when there weren't enough long-term-care facilities available and people were really stranded in hospitals. As much care as they received in the hospitals, which was good, it wasn't appropriate care that they received. I know that my own dad was in that limbo time when the previous PC government had put the dollars forward but the new beds hadn't been built—certainly in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock—and how badly I felt that he was actually holding up a hospital bed and wasn't getting the appropriate care, and the stress it created, not only on our own family, but on everyone involved in trying to give him the care he needed, and the change that came about when he was able to get into a long-term-care facility, because there was appropriate care there. They were able to handle those situations, and it made such a difference.

We've known the demographics in Ontario have been changing for a long time. The Liberal government has been in for five years now. There has been a large increase in the demand for long-term-care beds that has not been addressed. It has doubled—like 24,000 people on the wait list—really nothing to be proud of. I know there have been slogans about this government in the paper, saying, "For long-term care, the cupboard is bare." That is truly what is going on in our communities across the province, and certainly in our ridings. I have 15 long-

term-care centres, and keep in touch quite often. Their wait lists have gone up so fast in the last year and a half. But, as I said, we all knew the demographics were coming.

I represent a riding with a high proportion of seniors who are retiring there, but they're also bringing their moms and dads with them for the long-term-care beds that are available there so they can be close at hand—we all want to be available to take care of our loved ones when they need us. This is what is happening, and I think we did not predict how much the demand would be in my riding, because we didn't realize how many people would be retiring and bringing up mom and dad. We welcome them, but we also have to have the facilities there to take care of them.

When they brought in Bill 140, the Long-Term Care Act, which was debated during the last Parliament, I know that one nursing home in my riding, Bon-Air, in Cannington, brought in nine recommendations. They are really advocates, out there looking to change the long-term-care system. As we have said and from what we've seen, the people who work in the long-term-care homes in all the ridings care. They are trying to take care of the residents as best they can; they try to treat them as their own. The changes we'd like to see: increasing operating costs for long-term-care homes to reflect the minimum increase in inflation, hiring 4,500 full-time staff—the Liberals made a promise that they would increase the level of care by \$6,000 per resident; we have not seen that. We're saying that worked personal care time for residents needs to increase to three hours per day.

As a nurse, you try to give care directly; I can speak to that from experience. But when there are 400 regulations that you have to abide by, you're taking time away from the patient and from delivering that care. It's just unacceptable that so many regulations are out there hampering the care that is delivered by these health care workers. I hope everyone today supports the resolution of the member from Simcoe–Grey.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I believe it's time for the member who moved the motion to make a two-minute response.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to begin by thanking all members that spoke this afternoon. It's quite pleasant to hear the support from all parties: the members for Trinity–Spadina, Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Kitchener–Waterloo, London–Fanshawe and Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. I certainly thank you from the bottom of my heart. Thank you for the personal comments and thank you for the best wishes of condolence.

I tried to word the resolution this afternoon in the private members' time that I have this year in a way that was non-partisan. Thank you for looking at it that way. It's time, obviously, in all of our ridings that the government got going again and restarted a program to build long-term-care beds. It has been five years of the Liberal government and you don't have too many beds that you can call your own. You did build some in the first year in office. You were completing the 20,000 and the \$2.1 billion that Mike Harris and Ernie Eves had set aside.

I ask you to not only express your support today and in the vote, which will take place in about 100 minutes from now, but also to plead with the Premier, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Health and the minister of infrastructure renewal to actually act upon this resolution, not just for my counties of Simcoe and Grey but also for your own ridings because I know that—I have no idea what time it is. Thank you to all who spoke today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. I appreciate the patience of the members with the little bit of problems with our clock this afternoon. I'm sure we will get that figured out very quickly.

POLICE OFFICERS

Mr. Bill Mauro: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the federal government should help make Ontario communities and families safer by providing sustainable, ongoing funding through its police officer recruitment fund, as Ontario does with both its 1,000 officers programs.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Bill Mauro: It is my pleasure today to have an opportunity to speak to this motion for about 10 or 12 minutes. It's obviously a topic that has seized, at one time or another, most members in the Legislature here today of all parties, and I would expect most members of all provincial parliaments and the federal government, all parties there as well. It's obviously something that we have all had to deal with at one time or another.

Also, I think it's very topical and appropriate that we're speaking about it this week. I'm sure most members here in the Legislature just this week had an opportunity to meet with members of the police associations from across the province of Ontario. I certainly did. I was pleased to have had an opportunity to meet with Greg Stephenson from the Thunder Bay Police Association, as a member of the Police Association of Ontario. Greg's doing a great job in Thunder Bay. I should also mention that we have a new incoming president in Thunder Bay, Keith Hobbs, and we look forward to working with Keith in the future.

I think the importance of policing in Ontario and in Canada is obvious to most members of the Legislature. I think the importance is obvious because I think it's the only mandated service that municipalities have to provide, if I remember my municipal experience correctly. Fire service is not mandated—nothing else. Not garbage pickup, nothing of the like, but policing certainly is and I think it's self-evident as to why that is the case.

In 2006, the federal government of the day announced the following: "Canada needs more front-line enforcement. According to Department of Public Safety documents, there is currently a shortage of 1,059 RCMP officers in federal, provincial, and municipal policing roles. In addition, many provincial and municipal police

forces are underfunded and overstretched. It is time to reinvest in front-line law enforcement in Canada.”

The plan goes on to say, “A Conservative government will reinvest savings from cancellation of the ineffective long-gun registry program into hiring more front line enforcement personnel, including filling 1,000 RCMP positions” and it will “negotiate with the provinces to create a new cost-shared program jointly with provincial and municipal governments, to put at least 2,500 more police on the beat in our cities and communities.”

1430

Crime, as I’ve said, is something that’s at the forefront today. When any of us turn on the television or turn on the radio or read a newspaper, it’s something that none of us can avoid having to deal with anymore. We are inundated with messages, visually, in print, and on the radio, that would have many of us believe some days that the sky is falling. Crime is right there, front and centre, in our face at all times. It’s always interesting, because as the media does what the media does, there is an explosion in the media. There are more outlets all the time, so we get this recurring message.

When we think about it in the context of war, on a global basis, never before in the history of the world have there been fewer people dying in armed conflict in the world, yet I’m not sure that people have that sense. I make that point because, when we’re talking about policing at local levels, in our communities in Ontario and across Canada, people certainly don’t feel safer. In fact, if you talk to criminologists or sociologists or governments at any level or neighbourhood associations or police associations, many of them will have a different take on this. They’ll all have different opinions and different theories.

That’s not the point of the resolution today, though. We’re not here to debate statistics. I think most people would agree that the crime we’re seeing seems more severe. I think more people would agree that we’re seeing different types of crime—more egregious. I think what probably bothers people the most is that some of the crime that’s going on seems to be of a very random nature. Of course, guns are playing a bigger role in the crime that we’re seeing all the time.

In Ontario, we’ve got two programs that I think are wonderful.

On the first program, I tip my hat to the former Conservative government. When they were in power, they brought in the community policing partnership program. That program was intended to supply 1,000 police officers to the province of Ontario over the course of five years. It was a cost-shared program between municipalities and the province of Ontario to focus on front-line policing—boots on the streets, as we like to say. Of course, all municipalities were going to be eligible to participate in that program.

Initially, the community policing partnership program was to sunset. The funding that was going to be allocated to the municipalities through this particular program was going to end after five years, and any municipality that

had become a partner in the program would then have had to fund those policing positions on their own on a go-forward basis at the end of five years. Thankfully, and I think very wisely, in 2000 or 2001, the former government decided that they were going to annualize that funding. I think they brought in an extra pot of about \$35 million to provide funding for those officers who were hired under that program.

So we’re very pleased and we’re very supportive of that program that was brought in in 1998 for five years under that government.

In November 2005, our government brought in a program as well: the Safer Communities program, which brought 1,000 more officers into the province of Ontario. Under our program, 500 of the 1,000 new officers would be deployed to community policing and 500 would be deployed to six key areas of serious crime: youth crime, guns and gangs, organized crime and marijuana grow ops, dangerous offenders, domestic violence, and protecting children from Internet luring and child pornography.

I was especially proud, within this Safer Communities program of 1,000 officers, that we set aside 60 officers for specific northern and First Nations communities and provided a special financial allocation to those communities of up to \$70,000 per year for officers in those communities in perpetuity. What that has meant in my community of Thunder Bay–Atikokan is that eight officers who were hired under that particular program will be funded by our government in perpetuity for up to \$70,000 per year. Under the former program brought in by the Conservative government, there were five officers hired in Thunder Bay. So between these two programs, we’ve brought 13 new officers into my riding out of the 2,000 in the province. I think it’s a tremendous collaboration between the two programs and speaks to what we can do.

The key to these programs is long-term sustainable and predictable funding. As I said, in my riding, 13 new officers have been hired. As a former municipal councillor—and I think many people in this Legislature bring that kind of a background to this place, and we all know the importance of long-term sustainable funding when we’re sitting around a council table, trying to budget for incoming years—as well as the community safety issue. We all know that it’s extremely important to have long-term sustainable funding.

I should say again that especially in northern, small rural communities, even in southwestern Ontario where municipalities are very small—and most municipalities in the province are small—many of them don’t have the fiscal capacity to even begin to apply to these programs. That’s why I think it’s important that the funding commitments be long-term and sustainable. We may be precluding small communities from applying to the program, and they may be excluded just based upon the fact that the funding isn’t there at the end of the five years.

We’ve done many great things. I want to highlight a few associated with crime that we’ve done: the expansion

of the guns and gangs task force; more crown attorneys; more probation and parole officers; major crime courts; mandatory reporting for gunshot wounds; more prosecutors instructed not to plea bargain on firearms-related offences; reverse onus bail on hearings for gun crimes; and on and on the list goes. This, in concert with our 1,000 officers program and the 1,000 officers program from the previous Conservative government, speaks to the importance of this issue to all governments.

Our concern as a government is with the federal government program. As I said at the beginning, they brought in with some fanfare in 2006, or at least they announced, the commitment to 2,500 officers in Canada, roughly allocated to Ontario about \$156 million out of about a \$400-million commitment, which represented about 40% of the capital program for these officers. That \$156 million is going to allow the province of Ontario to hire approximately only 330 officers. If you take the per capita funding formula and apply it to the 2,500 officers, we would expect that in Ontario we'd get about 1,000 officers through the federal program. But at \$156 million, we're only going to be able to hire in the order of magnitude of about 336 officers. This is a far cry from the 1,000 you would have expected we would have been able to get out of the 2,500.

The second problem with the program as we see it, as I've said consistently throughout my remarks today, is that there is no long-term funding to go along with these officers. The funding is intended to sunset after five years. As I've said, there are communities that can take on this financial responsibility long-term, and there are many in this province—small northern, southwestern, southeastern, rural communities—that do not have the fiscal capacity to take on that financial obligation long-term. So there are two pieces that we're interested in with the federal government. We're all happy that they made the commitment to 2,500 officers across Canada in 2006, but we here today express a concern that that commitment is not going to be lived up to, at least on the numbers we're seeing so far, that Ontario appears only able to afford to hire 330 officers out of what we would have expected to be in the order of magnitude of about 1,000.

Even if we are able to get to that number, and hopefully that will change, as we go forward in concert with the federal government as we work with them to try to enhance this program, and they will come to realize that as the funding is set to sunset in five years on this particular program, there are many municipalities that I believe, in my personal experience of having done this for about 11 or 12 years now, will not be able at all to even consider participating in the program.

There are two main pieces here that I'm trying to speak to today. I look forward to listening to the remarks from those who have chosen to speak on this resolution today. I thank them in advance for their comments and hopefully their support. We see this as a non-partisan issue. We thank the federal government for its commitment on the 2,500. But we are hoping, moving forward, that they will see fit to increase that amount of money so

that it will be long-term and sustainable in perpetuity for these officers, and the volume of fiscal resource provided to the provinces will increase to the point where we'll be able to hire up to what we think would be about 1,000 officers in the province of Ontario.

I see my time is up. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: It's a pleasure to rise today to speak in support of Ontario's police officers and all the law enforcement people on the front lines. They work hard and put themselves in danger in order to keep us safe, or as safe as they possibly can with their numbers.

1440

This week, you will remember that the Ontario police association was at Queen's Park to speak to the members. I had the privilege of being visited by five officers from the Oxford Community Police to talk about what was needed and what could be done to improve the law enforcement in our community and, conversely, across the province. I want to thank them for coming here and helping us to understand the needs out there on the front lines.

I want to speak to this resolution and I want to tell the member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan that, in fact, I will be supporting the resolution. I think anyone who looks at it realistically and says, "What is it that we can do to make our streets safer, to make our communities safer?"—it is to increase the ability to enforce the laws and to curtail crime in the community. The issue isn't so much about who's paying, but the fact that we're able to provide the services for our constituents. So I support the resolution that we need to do all we can to increase the number of police officers that protect us.

I'm a little concerned as to the implications of the on-going funding, that that's part of the—I'm not suggesting that that isn't what needs to happen, but I don't think that's the biggest issue today. One of the examples I want to use, and I think it so happens, particularly with the present government—we heard it just last week or the week before when the provincial municipal review came out, and they said they're going to fix the problem. One of the things that needs to go back up to the provincial government from local government is court security. That would increase the number of dollars available for front-line policing in our communities to quite a great extent.

We're talking here about long-term funding as opposed to solving the immediate problem. The federal government said, "We're going to put some money in to help with the cost of policing, to get people out in the street to protect us." The provincial government says, "We think long term is much better. We're going to help that front-line service starting in 2012, and not pay for that court security until 2018. Then we'll finally be able to use that money and let the municipalities have the ability to hire more police officers—or not even hire more police officers; the police officers who are presently responsible for court security will then be allowed

to go into the front line to help protect our community.” It seemed to me that it’s much more important to deal with the immediate problem, and then start working on making sure we have continued funding to keep it going.

My leader spoke to the police association when it was here at Queen’s Park. Relating to the comments I just made, I just wanted to put on the record some of the comments that he made to the police association. I think it’s so important that—and I don’t want to read the whole speech, obviously. It’s longer than the time that I have. I just wanted to go into the part about the continued funding.

He’s speaking to the police association: “I know you continue to have some concerns about the federal funding of additional police officers for Ontario over the next five years. I understand this concern, but I also understand any government wanting to be responsible when it comes to the length and breadth of the promises they make.

“Let me say two things. First, I want to commend the fact that Mr. Harper and his government have made a commitment to fund additional police resources, and a significant quantity of money has actually been made available to do just that.” We’re talking about a new venture. Up until now, policing has been the responsibility of the provincial government and the municipal government. This is the first venture into the federal government funding local police services.

“I believe the Ontario government is deliberately”—and the next is an unparliamentary word; it works fine in our society, but we’re not allowed to say it here. It’s leaving an impression different than the one that they’re actually saying—“the public when they posture and say they never expected to have to bear a share of the total cost. Mr. McGuinty and his government understood the criteria and signed on the dotted line when they took the money.” And again, we’re talking about what this money was supposed to do. The government is telling us now that in fact, “Well, no. We didn’t really understand that. We thought maybe the federal government was going to put money up and then fund policing from here on in, that percentage of the total cost.” The provincial government knew exactly what they were getting.

“Second, I will make this commitment to you as leader of this party and as Premier in three years ... I will fight for more.” I think that’s the critical part: “I will fight for more.” We will fight for more. I think that’s the message I just wanted to leave to the member in this debate, that getting the money in the first place is the important part today, fighting for more. Make sure we get that discussion over with, and the funding will carry on after that fact. Many times—in fact, I think at all times, all funding on projects like this—the funding is put out when the project is started, but it’s very seldom put on that we will never change this program; it will never stop. As the member mentioned in his opening remarks, the provincial government did that when we were government. We put the program in place for a period of time. It’s working well. We realize that to keep it working, which we all want, we put in more funding.

I think we collectively in this House, members on all sides, need to work to make sure that when these police officers are put on the front line and the time comes that they need to be funded further than what the program presently is, we are there to get that funding so that services will continue on. I don’t see that they should announce that it will be carte blanche forever, but I do believe we all need to work together to make sure that we have this money to provide front-line services through our police departments to protect our public.

I would like to thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It’s a delight to stand as a New Democrat in support of the member from Thunder Bay—Atitoken’s resolution. We in the New Democratic Party support any effort to increase the number of our front-line workers, and our front-line workers in the police force in particular. Many members may not be aware, but the actual number of police officers per capita has gone steadily down, so that although the numbers have increased, the net effect of their presence has diminished. So, absolutely, we support this.

I also have a personal interest in this. My husband used to be a police officer and is now teaching, as we speak, police foundations for Humber College. So he is hopefully educating a whole new generation of police officers that we in this House, and I think certainly federally, would like to see have jobs one day. So there is that.

I also want to give kudos to my own two divisions, 11th and 14th, who have done a phenomenal job in Parkdale—High Park. I had the privilege—I wouldn’t say pleasure—of going on a ride-along with 14th division. Certainly a shout-out goes to the head of that division, Ruth White, an amazing woman coming up to retirement—too bad; for us, not for her. The ride-along, as many members I’m sure have gone on ride-alongs, was incredibly eye-opening, and not in a positive way. I do remember that as we were driving around—and this was not at the most dangerous time of night, which is usually after the bars close, but around 9:30 to 10 o’clock in the evening—I witnessed the computer that sits between the passenger side and driver’s side in a policemobile light up. I said to the sergeant, “What are all those little flashing colours for?” And he said, “Well, you know, the red ones are the critical incidents where someone is being threatened that we have to respond to now.”

“What are all the yellow ones?” “Oh, well, those are crimes in progress, but don’t worry about them. We won’t have time to get to them tonight.”

There were 20 cars on the road that night: 20 cars for a riding of 100,000 people. I believe it was a Friday night that we were out. This is the state that we put our officers in daily. Not only do we put them in a situation where they are underfunded and understaffed, but we also put them in a situation where they’re in harm’s way. I want

to reiterate that, because one of the wonderful discussions I had yesterday when the Police Association of Ontario came to Queen's Park and lobbied all of us was around a bill that I will be bringing forth next week but I highlighted yesterday. Thank you to Sean of Global, who did a wonderful spot on this last night in the news, but the situation of all front-line workers—firefighters, police and paramedics—when it comes to post-traumatic stress disorder.

1450

Now, I know that we initiated a bill, under Andrea Horwath, extending presumptive diagnosis—or rebuttable presumption, as it's called in legalese—to firefighters for certain kinds of cancer. In other words, if a firefighter runs into a fire and gets a certain variety of cancer, it's presumed now that that is as a result of his or her job. Kudos to the government for acting on that and bringing that forth. The problem is that there are other diseases, not only physical, that are a direct result of front-line workers being put in harm's way, and one of them is post-traumatic stress disorder. Certainly we realize that front-line workers witness and experience trauma, and they shouldn't have be retraumatized going through the process at WSIB to be able to receive benefits for something that is clearly related to their job function.

I was delighted when Larry Molyneaux, who is the president of the PAO, came forward and said that he supported my efforts on this and would support a bill, on behalf of his membership, that would extend coverage in rebuttable presumption, which simply means that the WSIB would have to prove otherwise—rather than that poor front-line worker suffering from PTSD would have to prove that they had it in the first place. So thank you, Larry, for that; thank you to the Police Association of Ontario.

But it highlights the issue; it highlights what we ask of our front-line workers. I think, certainly, in listening to my colleagues from the Progressive Conservative Party and my colleagues from the Liberal Party, that there is some blame to go around. We were promised 1,000 new officers in the province of Ontario, but the problem is that there were strings attached to that offer. They couldn't be used at the discretion of the divisions, but they had to fall into certain categories. Now, we know when that happens, the police forces still have to staff up on the front lines around them. So sometimes it's helpful; sometimes not so much.

So, in effect, we really didn't get 1,000 new officers here—and certainly federally, I'm sorry, Stockwell Day made a promise and he didn't carry through on the promise. He negotiated with the provinces. Whatever went wrong, there was a promise made; there wasn't a promise kept for those 2,500 new officers, and absolutely, that's why we support this member's bill. There's no question about it, this is absolutely critical.

I know my husband spent a very brief time with Waterloo regional before he went to university, but in his time there, he experienced first-hand, just as a traffic

police officer, what officers put up with on a daily basis. They put up with abuse, they put up with danger, they put up with overwork, all without an adequate level of support. We need only look at the rates, for example, of alcoholism. He said, in his own division, the divorce rate was around 75%. It's not only the police officers that we ask to put themselves in harm's way; we ask their families to put themselves in harm's way. These are families who do without their husbands or their wives, their mothers or their fathers, for long stretches of time, not knowing what situations they're walking into, not knowing what they are going to carry out from that situation in the way of trauma. This is an ongoing problem, and it really is one that needs to be addressed.

Certainly this is a first step. I hope it's not just a partisan exercise, I hope it's not just a way of shaming Conservatives, and I hope that my colleagues to the right are not just in this to shame Liberals. I hope that we can all come together on this issue and wherever we have any leverage, whether it's provincially or federally, use that leverage within our own political parties to press for, first of all, promises kept, of course; but also for this important initiative of 25 new police officers who, quite frankly, should be assigned without specific tasks associated with the offer, but left to the discretion of their own brass and their own divisions to be used where the need is greatest. That's absolutely what police on the ground level are looking for. There's no question.

One of the wonderful aspects of the lobbying days that came out of the PAO's presence here is that I hope MPPs of all stripes got a very good impression of what a police officer is today. A police officer, by and large, is a very educated member of society. Most of them have degrees now. Most of them provide services not only of enforcement but of social work, because of the problems of poverty, which increase for reasons that we've outlined over and over again in the New Democratic Party; and because of all of those causes of crime, as well as manifestations of crime, that are on the increase, including a worsening economy and job layoffs. We need these front-line workers more than ever; and more than ever, they'll be put in harm's away.

I notice my colleague from Thunder Bay—Atikokan, across the way, mentioned statistics, and we should all be aware of this: Crime statistics across Ontario, for the most part, have gone down. Certainly in my own riding of Parkdale—High Park, it has been a steady graph that shows a diminishing of crime.

However, that belies some of the lived reality of crime in our ridings. One of them is that issues like break-and-enters, issues like petty robbery, which at one time would have been reported, now a lot of citizens say, "What's the point?" Somebody comes and takes the report, and they know the report won't be acted on—through no fault of the police force; the fault lies in the lack of personnel. So, again, those statistics are not really an accurate version of what's going on in our communities.

As the member mentioned, crime is getting more violent in instances. The police had a great deal to say

about that and ways of addressing that. Certainly, mental health and addiction issues are top of the list in terms of what police have to deal with. We could help them by putting more money into rehabilitation beds and more money into mental health, which is a very, very insignificant, small part of this government's budget. There are all sorts of other ways that we could help front-line workers in doing their jobs.

When I come to table a bill next week about post-traumatic stress disorder, I'll ask all members to look at it again, not in a partisan way but as something that will help our front-line workers and something, quite frankly, that wouldn't even require new legislation, that could be done in regulations under the bill that has protected our firefighters a little bit more, that was originated, again, as I say, by Ms. Horwath, from the New Democratic Party. Just by simply extending the regulations, they could do all front-line workers a great service.

Suffice to say, and to wrap up, I absolutely do support this. I commend the member for bringing it forth. You have not only my support but, I'm sure, our federal colleagues' support in pressing for this in Ottawa, where, after all, we are the true opposition.

We will all work to see that the promises made by Stockwell Day are held, are kept. We will keep fighting until we see every single one of those 2,500 new officers delivered—really, a drop in the bucket.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. Further debate? The member for—

Mr. Monte Kwinter:—York Centre.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): York Centre. Sorry.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am delighted to be able to speak in support of the motion by the member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan.

I was intimately involved in the negotiations with Stockwell Day at a provincial-federal-territorial meeting, where he announced that the federal government would be providing 2,500 police officers for municipal policing in Canada.

At that point, my fellow ministers questioned how this was going to be done. Normally, policing is municipal and, by extension, at the provincial level, but there has been no precedent for the federal government to get involved in municipal policing.

They wanted to know the terms, the structure, the formula. He said, "Well, I thought we would do a 70-30." They said, "Well, 70-30. Now, that's ridiculous. We're not prepared to pay 30." He said, "No, no, no. You're paying the 70, and we're going to pay the 30." And they said, "Well, then it's your program; it's not our program. And you should be paying the whole thing." So that was left in abeyance, and there were many, many discussions. This went on for a couple of years. Just before the election, I met with Stockwell Day again and I said, "We've just gone through this exercise of our community policing program where we've worked out the formula to allot officers across the province. We have that done.

There's no reason for you to reinvent it because you don't have the background that we have."

1500

One of the biggest issues in police funding is that in most municipalities it's the largest single item on the municipal budget. You should know that every police service has a fixed complement of officers which they are empowered to hire. When people retire, quit, leave, they don't reduce the number. That number is immediately filled through that prescribed complement because the budget is there. The other things—retirement is covered differently through the pension plan.

So when this initiative was made, both by the previous government and our government from 2003 to 2007, this was additional police officers. These were in addition to the fixed complement that all police services have. When we decided to do this, we sought the advice of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police as to what would be the best way to implement it. They said, "First of all, we think that there should be some criteria as to where these officers are going to go." That was negotiated with the chiefs as to many of them going to neighbourhood policing and others going to very specific areas where they felt they needed that extra support. We came up with the allocation that was agreeable to the PAO and the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, and that's how it happened.

Now, the other problem that we had is that many municipalities couldn't—this is a shared program. The previous program, the community policing program that was instituted by the Conservative government, was at \$30,000 an officer, and ours was at \$35,000, to take into account inflation, but that's only the cost of a first-class constable. There's all sorts of residual and ancillary expenses. They have to buy them uniforms, have to train them, have to send them to Aylmer and provide cars so that they can drive them. All of these things add on. It is a very, very expensive item in any municipal police service budget. As a result, many municipalities said, "Thanks but no thanks, because we can't and do not want to come up with our share of the cost, the \$35,000 per officer."

To give you an example, right here in Toronto we had allocated the city of Toronto 250 police officers, and the mayor and the city council of the day said, "Thank you but no thank you. We're not taking any of them because we can't afford to do it." I had met with the chief, and he was quite unhappy about the fact that here was an offer from the province to fund half of 250 officers in perpetuity and the city council wasn't accepting it. As it turned out, the morning that I was making the announcement, they capitulated and said they would take them, but when I got through with the program, I had several municipalities that had agreed to take officers say, "Sorry, we're not going to take them because we can't afford to pay our share." I had to sort of scramble and find other municipalities that would take them.

We now have a situation where the federal government has come up with \$156 million over five years to

fund \$35,000 per officer for five years. That puts another additional strain on the municipalities because they're saying, "In five years' time, we have to, without increasing an officer, suddenly pay another \$35,000, and that's a challenge."

But when you get down to the actual facts of what happened, half of that \$156 million went to the OPP, and that's okay, because the OPP provides municipal policing to many, many communities in Ontario. They are the municipal police force. Twenty per cent went to aboriginal policing, and that's okay too because aboriginal policing has huge challenges, and they have a very great problem with funding.

So what that means is that only 30% of the funding that is coming to Ontario is actually being allocated to police services. In practical terms, what does that mean? The city of Toronto gets 36 officers, the city of Ottawa gets 10 and Peel region gets 11. Those are the largest police services in Ontario, and that is the total number of police that will be provided to them by this particular program.

What also happens is that when you go to outlying communities, where they have relatively little crime, it's very difficult for the reeves or the mayors or city councils to say, "Why are we hiring more police when all the statistics are showing that the crime rate is going down?" The perception in the large urban areas is that the crime rate is going up. You just have to look at yesterday: four homicides in one house. People say, "Oh my God, this is awful. What are you going to do about it?" You have this sort of enigma where the statistics keep showing that the crime rate is going down but the perception and the actuality that people feel is that the crime rate is going up.

So we have a problem where the delivery did not meet the promise. The federal government said, "We're going to provide 2,500 officers." What they should have done is taken a look, as we did, and ranked them in a way that said, "These are the municipalities that have the problems. That's where we should be concentrating our resources." To have Toronto getting 36, Ottawa getting 10 and Peel getting 11 is really inadequate.

I fully support the member's motion.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It's a pleasure to speak to this, particularly after the former Solicitor General of Ontario had a few words to say on the subject, because he was able to frame the subject and talk about some of the nuances and difficulties people have when there is implementation of programs. I think that my impression, after listening to the member from York Centre, was that this is not an area of federal responsibility. When the federal government decides to launch itself into an area that is not necessarily its responsibility, one can assume that perhaps it won't work out the way it is intended. However, through much negotiation, there were some benefits to it.

The member also talked about that wonderful conundrum for politicians, in that we have a public perception

of increased crime on our streets and on the roads, increased bank robberies, increased crime in almost every facet of our society. I have rural areas in my riding of Halton where the crime rate is almost negligible; I have urban areas in my riding where the crime rate on a per capita basis is probably 15, 20, 25 times greater than in the rural areas. However, even in the rural areas, the perception, because of the press coverage of those kinds of things, is that crime is increasing. The statistics we have—albeit the comments of the member from Parkdale-High Park that people may not report minor crimes the same way they did in the past; I don't know if that's true or not, but that may be a mitigating factor—are that crime rates are probably dropping. I think most people would agree that the facts substantiate that crime rates are dropping.

So here we have public perception and the facts, and they don't line up, and that's a conundrum for politicians. However, it is the stuff that statesmen are made of. A statesman, of course, goes with the facts and isn't influenced by public opinion, whether it be right or wrong. Statesmen are eloquent enough—far more eloquent than I—to take the high road and put the situation into the parameters it should have.

1510

One of the thoughts, I think, behind the federal initiative was to allow municipalities to ramp up their policing requirements to where they might be five years from now, and therefore provide for safer communities. That's why it was a five-year program. Municipal budgets don't allow for that kind of flexible program that would allow you to ramp up today for tomorrow's needs. They're based on annual needs, and those kinds of things don't fit well into municipal programs. So, therefore, the program was probably destined for some problems.

I would also suggest that perhaps, when the federal government presented their case—I didn't hear the member from York Centre talk as to whether they were expecting to pay a portion of the money. It seemed to me that the federal government—it was not a 100% program; there was a 70-30 share, I believe. I'm not sure if that ever changed. If it did change, you didn't mention it, but—

Mr. Monte Kwinter: Fifty-fifty.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It changed to a 50-50 program? You lost ground on that one.

When one level of government is trying to implement those kinds of things, perhaps more consultation and more thought should have been put into it.

I'll be supporting the bill. It's a good bill, and when someone opens their mouth and makes a promise, they should fulfill it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you, Madam Speaker, again for allowing me to speak.

First, I want to congratulate the member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan for bringing such an important issue to this House to be debated. We met with the police

association this week when they came to this beautiful place to update all the members on both sides of the House about their issues, and also to celebrate the retirement of my friend and constituent, the head of the association, Bruce Miller, who was here this week too.

I also want to congratulate the member for educating us about this issue, and also the member from York Centre, who was the minister at the time. He explained to the House what happened behind closed doors and about the details of this agreement. I hope the federal government fulfills their obligation and duty and hires 2,500 police officers, because we need them badly.

I want to allow my friend and colleague to continue the debate and explain our thoughts and support to the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I would like to start by commending the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan for bringing this issue forward. Safer communities are a priority for all of us, all Ontarians, including our government. I welcome the motion that you have brought forward today.

I think that each and every one of us wants to live in a safe community, and each and every one of us wants to identify how we might better be able to provide the support and the resources our policing community needs to be successful in this common aim.

I have had the opportunity to speak in the House about how important community safety is to the residents of York South–Weston and how, over the past few months, in areas of my riding—although stats generally show that crime is decreasing, and other members have mentioned that crime is decreasing in their areas—the opposite has been happening. We have experienced a series of incidents of violence and shootings that have been very worrisome to the families, business, the police and the elected officials of York South–Weston. Residents are very concerned. They're looking for answers. They would like to see more officers on foot patrol, and they ask for a more visible public policing presence in the community. For newcomers to Canada—we have a lot of newcomers in York South–Weston—this offers also an opportunity to get to know the officers as members of the community and not as distant figures; as ones more involved in their everyday concerns. The community at large is looking for a common solution, although we realize that this will require time and effort.

Six city councillors in our area have formed the West Toronto Crime Task Force. They're taking a team approach to addressing the issues of crime that are affecting our community. But police play a vital role in making Ontario communities and families safer, and the federal government should help by providing sustainable, ongoing funding through its police officer recruitment fund. We have to have all the partners at the table.

On behalf of the residents of York South–Weston and on behalf of Ontarians in general—and the policing com-

munity, I should say—I really urge an increased support by all the partners involved and especially by the federal government so that together, we can restore the confidence that is needed and we can build safe, strong and vibrant communities. I believe that each and every one of us should have a right to live in a very safe community, as safe as possible.

I would like to again commend the member for bringing this motion forward, and I will be supporting this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan for a reply.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank all of the members who took the time to be here today to speak to this motion and for the indication of their support on the motion when it comes to voting. I do, however, have to make some comments in regard to the remarks that were made by the member from Oxford.

Unfortunately, I found his comments to be a bit unusual, shall I say. He chose an example that was a bit odd when he talked about court security costs and linked what he would suggest is not a fast enough uploading on court security costs to the lack of fiscal capacity for municipal police forces to hire more officers. It's an unusual example for him to raise given that in fact it was their government—I believe the member from Oxford might have been in cabinet at the time when the Conservative government of the day chose to download that specific service onto the backs of the very municipalities that he now wishes had more fiscal capacity. I found it a bit unusual that he would choose that as an example with which to try to paint and mark up our government a little bit.

He also talked about how the funding parameter of the program, at least in his opinion, seemed to be expressed as being less than important. I tried to consistently, throughout my remarks for 12 minutes, suggest to all members of the House that it's a very important part of the program because, if it's not there at the beginning, if we don't have the long-term sustainable funding going forward, in fact many municipalities will not choose to participate in the program. We heard in the remarks from the member from York Centre, who was there and involved in the program, how even municipalities as large as those that we find in the GTA were considering not participating in the program because there might not be long-term funding at the end of the five years. What could it mean if large municipalities in the GTA can't afford it? What does it mean to smaller municipalities in northern, rural, southwestern and southeastern Ontario? A couple of odd examples.

I want to thank those who spoke. I want to thank them for their support. We've got 2,000 officers through two programs—provincially funded, great programs. We're simply looking for the federal government to live up to a commitment that they made, even though it's not an area of responsibility—they made a commitment. We're looking for them to follow through on it.

RED TAPE REDUCTION
POLICY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA POLITIQUE
DE RÉDUCTION DES FORMALITÉS
ADMINISTRATIVES

Mr. Norm Miller moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 121, An Act to require consideration of a red tape reduction policy as a precondition for enacting bills and making regulations and to require a review of Acts and regulations from the viewpoint of the policy / *Projet de loi 121, Loi exigeant de tenir compte d'une politique de réduction des formalités administratives avant d'édicter des projets de loi ou de prendre des règlements et exigeant l'examen des lois et des règlements à la lumière de cette politique.*

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm very pleased to have an opportunity today to debate my private member's bill, Bill 121, the Red Tape Reduction Policy Act, 2008.

I was first prompted to present the Red Tape Reduction Policy Act as a result of a number of encounters with small business owners and out of my own past experience as a business person. More and more, I've heard about the crushing weight of red tape on small business across the province. I've also heard about the horror stories of businesses suddenly faced with the heavy hand of government inspectors, and I will expand upon that in a moment. The bottom line is that small business is vital to Ontario's recovery from have-not status.

1520

The TD small business survey results show that small businesses are worried about cash flow, making payroll, suppliers' bills and rising energy costs. The CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, says that two out of three businesses surveyed find that the overall burden of provincial regulations has increased in the past three years. Small businesses comprise 96% of all the businesses in the province of Ontario, so creating an environment that is business-friendly and that nurtures small business has never been more important. That is exactly what this bill will do.

The Red Tape Reduction Policy Act would require that all government bills satisfy a test related to the reduction of regulatory burden on persons or bodies. It would require that the government undertake a similar requirement for making regulations connected to a bill. Six months after enacting the bill, the government would undertake a review, within three years, of all public acts and regulations with a view to the red tape reduction policy, to be undertaken by the ministry responsible for each act. Ministers would report regularly to cabinet and the Legislative Assembly as to the progress of the review, and the government would report its progress every six months to the Legislative Assembly.

My private member's bill, if passed, would create a test which draft legislation must satisfy. That test comprises a series of questions that a minister must answer before presenting a bill in the House. These include:

(1) Does the bill set out the public policy that it seeks to address?

(2) Is the bill necessary to achieve the public policy?

(3) Has the government identified the regulatory burden that the bill imposes on persons or bodies?

(4) Has the government identified the amount of time and cost that persons and bodies on whom the bill imposes a regulatory burden would incur in complying with the burden?

(5) Has the government had a cost-benefit analysis done of the regulatory burden?

(6) If the bill imposes a regulatory burden on persons or bodies, do the public policy and cost-benefit analysis justify imposing the regulatory burden?

I would like to comment on that particular point. Yesterday, my colleague from Dufferin-Caledon asked the Minister of Labour a direct question on this very point. Ms. Jones asked Minister Fonseca to release the impact cost analysis that should have been prepared before the WSIB bill, Bill 119, was introduced and to make public what these changes would mean for small business owners. The minister's refusal or inability to answer the question suggests that no analysis was done. With the passage of this bill, that would not be acceptable.

Continuing with other provisions of this bill:

(7) Has the government consulted with the persons and bodies on whom the bill imposes a regulatory burden to determine if there are alternatives that will fill the public policy?

Again, we need only look at the WSIB bill, Bill 119, to see that the government's handling of this legislation would be in marked contrast to legislation created under the provisions of my private member's bill.

(8) Has the government assessed the effect that the bill could reasonably be expected to have on the Ontario economy and the economic competitiveness of Ontario, as opposed to other jurisdictions that are economic competitors of Ontario?

(9) Has the government compared the regulatory burden that the bill imposes on persons or bodies with the regulatory burden imposed on persons or bodies by legislation in other jurisdictions that are economic competitors of Ontario?

(10) To the extent reasonably possible, does the bill avoid overlap with requirements imposed by other Ontario legislation or by other levels of government?

(11) If there are existing requirements in Ontario legislation that fulfill the public policy, is it reasonable to eliminate the requirements once the bill comes into force?

(12) If the bill increases the powers, duties or burdens of any person or body in the public sector, is the government satisfied that there are no alternatives that fulfill the public policy but that involve less of an

increase of the powers, duties and burdens of any person or body in the public sector?

(13) If the bill increases the powers, duties or burdens of any person or body in the public sector, does the bill or other legislation or policy directives ensure that there are standards for delivery of services by those persons or bodies?

(14) Is the bill written in plain language?

By the way, this is a very common complaint that I hear from business people, not just about legislation and regulations, but about the endless number of forms that business owners are subjected to.

(15) Does the government have plans to ensure adequate explanation to the public of the regulatory burden that the bill imposes on persons and bodies?

(16) Has the government set a date to review whether it is advisable to continue the regulatory burden that the bill imposes on persons and bodies or to remove the burden?

(17) Has the government considered all other questions of a similar nature to the questions set out in paragraphs 1 to 16 that are prescribed by the regulations made under this act?

As I mentioned earlier, as small business critic, I have been approached repeatedly for help in dealing with the heavy-handed provincial inspectors in unravelling red tape. I would like to elaborate on a couple of those cases now to illustrate just how bad things are.

A Markham media production company specializing in videographing weddings and corporate functions contacted me recently about a retail sales tax audit. They have three employees. When the company started out a few years ago, they went to the chamber of commerce seminar and were told to use tax guide 901, *The Basics of Retail Sales Tax*. The guide did not list photography as a taxable service and therefore they never charged or collected retail sales tax. They have always promptly reported their monthly sales and remitted retail sales tax. Recently, they received an RST assessment and were advised that they have been doing it wrong for the past four years. They've been reassessed, all services, not just products. The assessor told them they should have been using guide 509 and didn't seem to know anything about guide 901. The preliminary assessment is \$47,000 plus interest and penalties, which could push the total to \$100,000. As it stands today, this business has been advised that regardless of the misinformation and the fact that the guide they were working off does not include photography and videography in the definition of taxable service, they will be charged the full amount. In fact, they will even be charged for contracts that have not received any tangible product because they have divorced or have not picked up their images or property.

They ask, "How can a company be charged back taxes on property that has never been received by the client?" It's a very good question. How can a small business be penalized for misinformation given to them straight from the Ontario government?

In September, I held a small business round table so I could hear first-hand about some of the challenges facing

businesses today. Things have changed little since I was in business. A resort owner told me how he was contacted by the Ministry of the Environment and was asked to provide copies of all his certificates of approval for each of his small waste water systems. He told the ministry official that all the certificates had been issued by the ministry and they should simply check their records. That sounds fairly reasonable to me. The ministry representative told him that they had lost some of their records and therefore the burden of proving that certificates had been issued now fell to the owner. How is that reasonable?

The lack of support for small business doesn't end with these examples. Not long ago, I met with a convenience store operator. He told me that times are tough. He has been in business for four years, and recently an inspector arrived at his business and wanted to see all the receipts for the past four years for cigars purchased. He was told that if he couldn't produce the receipts, he would be presented with a fine of \$10,000. At no time since he bought the business has anyone from the government come around to tell him that he should be hanging on to these receipts. In fact, at no time has anyone from the government come to give him any kind of advice or support on how to comply with your government regulations.

Now we have Bill 119, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, before the Legislature. If ever there was a bill that would not meet the test of my private member's bill, this is it: no cost-benefit analysis, no consultation, heavy-handed regulatory burden. Even though this government has had lots of feedback from small business, the government is ploughing ahead with its agenda.

It is time that we all recognize that small business is important to our economy and that wealth creators are important to all of us. They make it possible to provide social services and to implement poverty strategies; they fund our health care and education programs through the taxes they generate and the jobs they provide, which also generate income taxes. We need to have regulations in Ontario that are easy to understand, that are communicated and explained clearly to business. We also need to have a change in attitude within our civil service in Ontario. We need the government to work with business to help them comply with the rules, not just act as the police coming down hard on business whenever it steps out of line.

The huge majority of businesses are not setting out to break the rules. It's just the government has created so many rules, it's impossible for small business to be aware of and comply with all the regulations.

1530

You may ask, how do I know this bill will really work? We need only look to British Columbia. In 2001, the government of the province of BC decided to create Canada's most small-business-friendly environment. They didn't pass a bill to do it. Instead, they partnered with small business and formed a strategy that has

informed every government ministry. Since 2001, BC has reduced regulatory requirements by 42%. They continue to strive for zero net increases in regulation. The result of that has been that in the past five years, BC has seen an 11% increase in the number of small businesses. We need to do the same to help small business in Ontario if we want to regain our place as the economic engine of Canada. It is long past due for the government policies to support small business. So I ask all members to support this private member's bill, Bill 121, and help reduce the red tape burden in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's an honour and a privilege to be the small business critic for the New Democratic Party, and also, at one time, a small business owner. I'm intimately involved with the small business associations in my riding and came forward, in fact, to this assembly my first year of election to put forward a motion to rationalize the business education tax across the province. We had a number of business improvement associations here.

I can safely say that in my years of small business involvement, I've never heard, number one, complaints of small business as being too much red tape. Here's what you hear from small business: You hear problems with undercapitalization, cash flow problems.

If you want to talk about a bureaucracy they have a problem with, it's the bureaucracy of banks, the banks who refuse to extend lines of credit, who refuse to honour lines of credit, and as soon as there's a cash crunch—as is the case now—banks that pull lines of credit. That's what small businesses list as a number one problem for them. Number two is taxes and the unfairness, often, of the tax regime and the burden that they have to shoulder. So those are one and two in terms of concerns for small business.

When it comes to red tape—and honestly, when you talk to the people in this House—just on a very personal level, I think most of us have far more problems with Rogers, if that happens to be our cable company. You should talk to my husband about dealing with Rogers, just to get someone to come out and look at your system. It's the privately owned, large companies that we have problems with—not to get into the entire discussion about credit card companies. If there's one bureaucracy that we would love to see reformed, it's the banking industry and the credit card companies, who really are criminals in this particular economic crisis in the way they deal with people and treat people. These are private companies.

Quite frankly, as far as the civil service is concerned, kudos to them for shrinking budgets. They've done a pretty good job. And yes, we know in our constituency offices that most of the time our staff deal with a bureaucracy that has to do more with government than with private companies, but quite frankly, most of those interactions really aren't too bad and are pretty streamlined.

I remember, as a small business owner, the early 1990s, roughly—a time maybe not quite as bad as what we're facing now, but it was a recession, and we all felt the pinch. I remember the conversations with the bank about lines of credit, conversations that really were spread across the province and the amalgamated effort of small business to get banks to loosen up, to be patient with their capital, to hold off a bit, to trust in your receivables and your track record. This is something that small business really needs, and it needs it with a bureaucracy that's most onerous to small business, and that's the banking establishment.

Certainly, in terms of red tape where governments are concerned, the major red tape we had to deal with was with the federal government, quite frankly: It was tax time. I have had complaints as well from businesses in my riding about that retail sales tax initiative. But there it's a question of training. And again, whether you're dealing with Rogers or the bank or Visa, it's kind of Business 101. You write down the name of the person you talk to. You keep track of your conversations. You one-up it and ask to speak to the manager. This is true of all bureaucracies, whether private or public.

I think the real impulse behind this bill is really not this bill, Bill 121, but is the move by our colleagues to the right of us, in more ways than one, against Bill 119, against the amendments brought forward to the WSIB coverage. That's where we, as New Democrats, really have to part ways. We would like to see all workers covered. If we have a problem with Bill 119, it's that it's not coming in fast enough.

I have to comment that there has been quite a bit of scaremongering around this bill. I've had a number of constituents call who thought that all of a sudden they were going to have to pay WSIB premiums—and they're not even in the construction trades. That's our responsibility, to get the information out. They also didn't know that the bill is not going to be enacted for three years. I've done my bit to make sure that people understand what's actually in the bill.

But let's look at Bill 119 from a business perspective, even. What this is doing is trying to create a more level playing field out there in the construction industry. That's what's happening here, and the government needs to be doing that.

We in the New Democratic Party feel that government has a substantial role to play in the economy. If there was ever a time, if there was ever an era, when it was absolutely crystal clear around the world that government has a place to play in the free market economy, it's right now. When we see the likes of George Bush intervening in a free market economy, surely we get it in Ontario: Government has a role to play. Government must play a role. In fact, even our federal counterparts are talking about a potential deficit, because investment may be needed, because this is not the time for balanced budgets. We all get that government, I hope, plays a role. It plays a critical role.

The days of the robber barons, I hope, are gone. Unfortunately, they seem to be making a resurgence. When

the average CEO is making \$9 million a year and the minimum wage, in real dollar terms, has gone down since the 1970s, when the gap between wealthy and poor is growing and when the middle class is being emptied out, surely we get that government has a role to play in stimulating the economy, in regulating the economy, and in making sure that out there among businesses it's an even playing field.

If some construction companies have to pay WSIB premiums to cover their workers, then all should—end of story. All workers should be covered. All owners of companies should pay to have them covered, not just some against others. So, really, in a sense, this is government interfering in a positive way, in helping level the playing field and helping protect workers.

We wish they'd go much further. We wish they'd bring in card certification for all workers. We wish they'd make sure that the minimum wage was a living wage. We wish they'd stimulate the economy by building affordable housing, as was promised. We wish, of course, as social democrats, that government would play a more proactive role than it has in the past.

That's what's really behind this Bill 121. Behind it is the concerted effort on the part of the Progressive Conservatives against Bill 119.

But let's not fool ourselves. Small business has huge issues and needs our help, absolutely. Ninety-six per cent of the businesses, as you heard the member say, are small business. They also tend to provide most of the employment. I'm not talking about businesses that employ 30 to 50 people. I'm talking about businesses that employ four to six people. That's the bulk of small business across the province.

They need our help. Where? Well, first of all, as a Toronto resident, I can say that small business needs our help here in the city of Toronto by uploading some of the costs that have been downloaded to the municipalities, and at a faster rate than 2018, thank you very much.

The city of Toronto is in deficit about \$700 million a year for provincially mandated programs that the province doesn't pay for. That's now, and that burden gets shifted onto property taxes. Guess who pays them? In part, small business.

1540

We need to upload faster and take that burden off small business and off the municipalities. That would help small business in terms of their tax crunch. Also, it would help rationalize the business education tax. Some attempt was made, but it was an inch where we need a mile: 416ers pay way more for their share of that than 905ers. That doesn't make sense. We all have the same education needs. That's something else the government could do to help small business.

The other thing that government could do to help small business—we would all have to work with our federal colleagues on this—is to make sure that cash keeps flowing to them, to make sure that the banks don't tighten up on credit just because there's a recession. We have to ensure, for small business and homeowners alike,

that credit is available and that it's patient credit; that credit lines are extended where they're needed; and that all of a sudden, just because the bank is facing some cash crunches of its own, it doesn't take that out on small business, which has happened in the past and, I have to say, inspired quite a movement across Toronto in the early 1990s to organize small business to fight back, to fight the banks on that issue alone. They've made some concessions but not nearly enough.

We have to really be vigilant, on behalf of small business, to make sure that money keeps flowing. Again, that's something this governments could do that's real, that's practical and that doesn't slap our civil service in the face for doing their jobs—maybe not always perfectly, but then, who does? What bureaucracy does? As I said, the bureaucracies that most small businesses have the major problems with have nothing at all to do with government but everything to do with our lending institutions.

As I said, anyone who has ever made a call to a cell-phone company—to Rogers—to a credit card company or to a bank—tell me in all honesty that you get faster and better service from those institutions than you do from the civil service. I really don't think you do. So it's not about privatization; it's not about letting the free market have its way. It is about being a government that cares, that intervenes in ways that we New Democrats think are not enough, facing the current trials and tribulations, and a government that cares about what small business really asks for. Again, what do they ask for? Number one, credit and the flow of capital, and number two, a fair and equitable taxation system that relies upon the uploading of downloaded costs to the municipalities; the government could do way more on those two areas. But unfortunately, the red tape is not one of them. We won't be supporting it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I rise today to recognize a turning point by Her Majesty's loyal opposition toward the government of Ontario and its vision of our province. However modest and tentative it may be, the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka has signalled a breakthrough moment. Although this is only private members' time, we all sincerely hope that he speaks for his leader and for his party.

For the first time, a member of the opposition has hinted that he gets it: Ontario's five-point plan to build the province's economy truly is the way to go. Let's quickly recap those five points: one, invest in skills and education; two, invest in infrastructure; three, support innovation; four, lower business costs; and five, strengthen key partnerships.

This proposed series of measures by the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka is a brave attempt to support point four, lowering business costs. We want to be helpful. The member has seen the light, and we want to help him succeed. So let's do our best with this well-intentioned

bill; let's be positive and constructive in our evaluation of it.

What does this bill seek to do? Does it enable the government of the day to more speedily enact legislation? Does it serve to better empower those whom the electorate chooses to send to this chamber to serve Ontarians? Does it provide clarity in converting the will of the people into the laws of the land? Sadly, the bill does not seek to do these things.

Consider its title, a masterpiece of bureaucratese in itself. Let's just repeat it: An Act to require consideration of a red tape reduction policy as a precondition for enacting bills and making regulations and to require a review of Acts and regulations from the viewpoint of the policy.

Mr. Jeff Leal: They're bringing back the gas busters.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Egad.

And this means what, exactly? Before either legislation or regulation could be enacted, as envisioned in this well-intentioned bill, drafts would be subject to fully 17 ponderous, time-consuming and inflexible processes that must all be surmounted before any change of any consequence could be enacted, any time and under all circumstances.

What this means is that policy analysts—and not MPPs, certainly not businesspeople, and not career ministry professionals—would forever be in the driver's seat in the government of Ontario. Consider just a few of the things these analysts must do before anything could change or anything new could be enacted by any government now or in the future. These include identifying, estimating and quantifying regulatory burden, conducting detailed cost-benefit analyses, writing justification reports, writing economic impact reports, writing competitive reports, writing jurisdictional comparison reports, calculating cross-tabulations of extra-jurisdictional impact reports—whatever that means; public communications reports, writing review date reports, and heaven knows what else.

It sounds very much like a recipe for gridlock. This may not be the member's intention. He is a hard-working, effective member. Let's give him the benefit of the doubt. It is not his intent, but it is surely the outcome.

In truth, much of this analysis has been done for decades in such committees as legislation and regulation, which is chaired by my very capable colleague from Peterborough. I have been pleased to serve on that committee. In the way Bill 121 is set out, this proposed new and very probably large evaluation bureaucracy would overlap—or supplant, because it's not entirely clear—the existing and quite effective legislation and regulations committee.

It might make more sense to empower ministries to evaluate their requirements, to formulate specific plans, to modernize and to streamline. The member is, however, moving in the right direction. Let us continue to say we like the things he's saying. I think he and his colleagues will get the trust part of working with the public service as this project continues to evolve.

Instead of triggering this process proposed by the member only when the government wants to do something, and perhaps may need to do something, the member might consider empowering the very people in the public service who work daily with the regulations. Ask them to come up with a regulatory burden reduction plan that could be implemented in a systematic and coordinated fashion.

Consider, for example, how the proposed ponderous sequence of evaluation processes would fail Ontario, fail our people and fail our Legislature in the event of a crisis like, oh, SARS, the blackout, the TTC strike or today's economic—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Flood of Peterborough, 2004.

Mr. Bob Delaney: The flood of Peterborough, or today's world economic meltdown. The act of drafting and enacting legislation and regulation is about results and not process. Dedicated public servants, empowered and trusted to make things simple, can do the job—I submit, can do the job better than legions of otherwise disconnected policy analysts.

1550

I do not presume the will of the House today. Of course, in private members' time, members are free to vote as they see fit.

Consider our alternatives. We could pass this bill and ask the member to refer it to a committee. Its quickly apparent shortcomings would, of course, require extensive rewrites and stakeholder hearings before it could come back to this place for third reading debate. If the member chooses this route, as is his right should it pass, I am confident that the government will use its majority on that committee to change the short title of the bill to the Analysis Paralysis Act. Alternatively, we could defeat the bill and allow our colleague to redraft it more quickly. He might bring it back to the House himself or ask one of his colleagues, perhaps co-sponsored with a government member, to introduce version 2.0 of what's before us today, which I emphasize again is a good start.

Still, however we vote on this bill, let us applaud the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka. He's a good man; he has grasped Ontario's need to lower business costs as part of this province's five-point plan for economic growth. The other four points are similarly sound. He and his party have finally seen the light.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to join in this debate on Bill 121, which is basically saying, "Let's reduce the red tape."

I know that the member opposite is saying that this is not going to work, but a very similar bill was introduced in British Columbia, and they reduced red tape by 42%. We don't need to reinvent the wheel; if they are able to do it out there, then we should be able to do it here. The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka, our small business critic who has done an exemplary job in that role, was a former small business owner himself and his family still

is now, and for generations before, so he knows of what he speaks.

I would not be the only MPP that gets so many calls into my office about red tape—I know the Minister of Small Business over there is raising his eyebrows—because there is no question, there is a huge amount of red tape that is frustrating all the small businesses in our riding. Talk to the agriculture community: They live in fear that the Ministry of the Environment car is going to go by. There's just this culture of enforcement, and nobody is working with anybody and saying, "These are changes that are coming. This is how we can help you make those changes."

I spoke about the long-term-care resolution that was brought forward earlier this afternoon and how long-term-care homes have 400 regulations. My goodness, how can you look after a patient when you're worried about 400 regulations? There are appropriate regulations that are in place for everyone's safety, but when it gets to be so enormous and so burdensome that it's driving people out of business, then there is a problem.

In the spring budget, the government said: "Ontario's goal is to lead all Canadian jurisdictions with its efforts to measure and reduce the regulatory burden. Ontario's regulatory modernization will start with an aggressive cap-and-trade initiative for government regulations, which means that when new regulations are enacted, others must be eliminated."

So, this is a start. The member from Parry Sound—Muskoka is saying, "Here is a bill; please use it. Please pass it today. Help our small businesses that are struggling and strangled from the red tape." We've heard it all for so many years. Let us get on with it and get it done. We can help the bureaucrats. We are the front lines. We're hearing back from our constituents. They are there trying to craft appropriate regulations. As I said, there's just too much regulation and red tape that's out there. To drive away the small businesses that help our economy, provide our jobs, provide top-notch goods and services—there is no excuse that we have so much red tape. If British Columbia, in the example used here, can reduce red tape by 42%, why are we not looking to them and saying, "What did they do? This is what they've done. This is what we should do here."

I know some of the members of the Legislature were at the cement association luncheon earlier this week, and they were speaking about the frustrations, in certain examples, about environmental assessments that can go on for a decade, which does not make sense. We all have to be precautionary with the environment, but we should be able to get an environmental assessment done, I would hope, within a year, because we can't be competitive with, say, Quebec, who can get environmental assessments done quicker. We're driving businesses to other provinces because we're making it so frustrating. So we have to change this whole mindset that exists out there. We're cramping any pilot projects or new initiatives, especially in the environment, that could be tested as pilot projects. But when it takes six years to get a permit

for the same thing that takes six days to get a permit for in Quebec, there's a serious problem right there. I know this is not new to lots of the members in the Legislature.

Just look at MPAC. The assessments are out. This week in my riding I've got lots of e-mails already on the assessments that have come out. When they phoned MPAC, they basically had said to them on the hotline that MPAC is the fault of the provincial government. We have made some changes to MPAC and the people there are good. They're following rules and regulations, though, that some of them need to change. And that's from the hotline that they phone today.

I'm going to mention Camping in Ontario, which has trailer campgrounds in many of our ridings. They have MPAC issues, have had for a long time—ever since I've been in the Legislature, which is five years now. They're asking for MPAC to be removed, which MPAC probably does not have a problem with. They're asking for a tag system in which they can issue the tags and the municipalities get the revenues from the tag system. There's a whole business there, Camping in Ontario, that would see revenue generated in our municipalities and give people of Ontario the type of recreation that they want and reduce MPAC being involved at all. They don't have to come out and measure the addition to the trailers. That's a waste of their time and our taxpayer money. This is an example that I can say we can eliminate, and I certainly would be pleased to work on any committees that can help with red tape reduction.

Just for example, up in Oxtongue Narrows, which is in the northern part of my riding at Highway 60—and I share part of that boundary with the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka—they need a new bridge. Their bridge is going to close down. How is it going to impact the resorts that are there? Because it's the entrance into Algonquin park? But there are these rules in the MTO—again red tape and regulations—that don't say, "My gosh, if we close that bridge, then they can't have people staying in their resorts because of all the noise and that"—MTO says, "But this rule says that." They have done a great job in changing the speed limit there for safer roads, but really, you've got to get some practical common sense into situations like this. The member from Parry Sound—Muskoka has done a good first step in bringing forward this bill and I hope the government adopts it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm pleased to stand up and speak and comment on the private member's bill brought by the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka about cutting red tape. I have been listening to both sides of the House talking about red tape and I don't understand what he was talking about. I know this similar bill came to our attention before. We defeated that bill. I don't understand whether he means we have to lay off inspectors, whether he wants to open the whole field to everyone to do whatever they want without any regulations. We saw what happened in the United States: Loose regulations

ended up with a big, huge catastrophe across the globe, a disaster across the globe in the housing industry, banking industry, financial industry. They all collapsed because they were open, with no regulation.

As you know, it is important for us in the province of Ontario to have some kind of regulation in order to protect the innocent people in this province, especially in small business. I've been in small business for many, many years. I don't see any barriers, objections or difficulties. The most important thing is to put a mechanism in place to protect the people, not to keep it loose, because people need protection.

We have with us here the minister who is in charge of small business. He wants to add his input to this issue and hopefully he can advise us and this House on his knowledge about cutting red tape.

I know our government were working hard as soon as we got elected in 2003 to eliminate many capital taxes, unify the forms, create a one-stop shop, have less forms, less requirements for many different businesses to do business and be successful in the province of Ontario, without jeopardizing our stability in business.

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Again, thank you, and I will allow my colleague the Minister of Small Business to continue the debate and advise the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka about the import on behalf of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Actually, my colleagues from Mississauga-Streetsville and London-Fanshawe talked a little bit about this bill, but I really want to talk about some of the things we have already done to reduce the paperwork burden on small business.

We realized three or four years ago that we needed to reduce the burden on small business. We have worked very systematically to reduce the paperwork burden on small business. In the first phase, we reduced it by 24% in seven ministries. In the second phase, we reduced it by 25.6% per cent in eight ministries. In the third phase, we will achieve similar results. So, overall, paperwork will be reduced in all ministries by about 25%.

In addition to that, we have automated business forms so that people don't spend too much time filling in the same information again and again.

The Premier has taken a very keen interest in making sure that not only is the paperwork burden reduced, but the overall burden on small business is reduced as well. We have created a secretariat solely dedicated to that, and we are in the process of implementing cap-and-trade, which means that if somebody wants to bring forward a rule or regulation, they have to bring forward another rule or regulation that they will eliminate from small business.

We want to create an environment in which we are open for business and businesses are focusing their attention on doing business rather than filling out forms for the government.

The intention of the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka, who introduced this bill, is the right one, but the government is already working on it. It's not that we have been sitting here doing nothing. We realized a long time ago that we needed to reduce the paperwork burden.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you, Minister. Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: It's interesting listening to this debate, on a couple of levels. If I may, I'll open with a couple of comments particular to my colleague from Parkdale-High Park talking about regulating large business and banks.

You know, the thing about small business—and I speak not so much as the member from Thornhill as a veteran of small business for about 15 years of my life—is that small business people try very hard to navigate the government-infested waters in dealing with regulations. The large businesses, the banks and so forth, also have to deal with these regulations, but they have the infrastructure and the resources to do it. Do you know what small business does? They pack up and they leave, and that has been happening in Ontario. And that, I believe, is the nub of why my colleague the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka has tabled Bill 121. Today I'm proud to rise and support my colleague in his private member's bill. This bill seeks to eliminate that very red tape in government business.

The definition of red tape that we found calls it "a derisive term for excessive regulation or rigid conformity to formal rules that is considered redundant or bureaucratic, and hinders or prevents action or decision-making." My goodness, that definition itself sounds like red tape!

Let's think about the performance of this government for the last five years, taking into consideration this definition. Excessive regulation? Check; it's there. Rigid conformity to rules, also known as lack of imagination? Also there. Redundant legislation? Check. And need I remind anyone of the ban on illegal handguns in cars? I remember bringing that one up. Did I mention a ban on illegal handguns in cars? Talk about regulation—this is government by regulation. Lack of action and decision-making? Check, and check again, so we're batting a thousand.

It is no surprise that my colleague felt absolutely compelled to introduce legislation that would reduce red tape. I believe that his bill will accomplish much more than that, because it really speaks to the government's need for three things, and I think these are three things that any government needs: transparency, accountability and responsibility.

What Bill 121 says is that it is not enough for the government to propose a solution to a particular problem if that solution itself causes additional difficulties. We debated, for example, the driving distractions bill this morning, and that very issue is basically about fixing something that, if it doesn't eliminate regulations or put in a minimum number of regulations, is no longer about driving distractions; it's about driving us to distraction

with a bill. It's a little bit like going back to school and learning to solve a math problem. It's not enough to provide the answer at the end, and no teacher worth his or her salt would accept that. You can't just provide an answer; you have to show how you arrived at the answer. That's when you catch the mistakes before it's too late. This is about the why and the how of a solution, not just the solution itself without any reason or any action to control.

This bill will actually force the government to stop and think—yes, think—before it opens its mouth with some superficial proposal that stops a small leak at point A but creates a flood at point B. Governments do this, and this one has developed a particular expertise.

I know that the terms “government” and “think” or “red tape reduction” or “cause and effect” are concepts that are somewhat unfamiliar in this chamber, and I urge everyone on the other side particularly to open up their minds and consider that this private member's bill is actually a proposal that would improve the work of government, the efficiency of the Legislature and the relationship this government has with Ontarians, very particularly the Ontarians who own and operate small business, the very same small business that drives this economy and on which we're going to depend more and more in the future.

The sad reality is that red tape has infiltrated and filled in virtually every crevice of government. It hinders the work of government, it hinders public servants and it is a burden on our citizens and on our small businesses. Unless we target red tape directly and make a conscious effort to reduce it in all the functions of government, it will strangle the province of Ontario. I've had personal experience, and I wish time permitted me to share it, but it's not unlike some of the issues that were related by my friend from Parry Sound—Muskoka—there was just a lot more money involved, if I recall.

The unfortunate thing is that far too often, governments create red tape because it makes them feel they are actually doing something about a problem. That brings to mind the example of making a fire so we can put our firemen to good use putting it out. This is especially the case with this government. They have made a career of doing absolutely nothing to resolve any real challenges facing Ontario to improve this province's outlook for the future, but they've kept themselves busy. That's why I constantly talk about nanny statism and bans and the rest of it.

I applaud and thank my colleague for putting this bill forward. I hope everyone will support it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member for Parry Sound—Muskoka for a reply?

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you to the members who spoke to my private member's bill today. I'll respond to a couple of the points made.

The member from Parkdale—High Park seems to think this bill has to do with Bill 119, the WSIB bill. I would simply point out that the bill was written prior to my knowing anything about Bill 119. I just used it as an

example of a bill that is not being consulted on and is going through without passing some of the tests this bill would provide.

The member from Mississauga—Streetsville raised concerns about a new bureaucracy being created and said it should be done ministry by ministry. If he read the explanatory note, it says, “The review is done by the minister responsible for each act” and each regulation, so it is ministry by ministry. I might point out that this is modeled after BC. The text came virtually verbatim from what they are doing in BC. In what they've done in the last five years, they've seen a 42% reduction in the regulatory burden and an 11% increase in the number of small businesses. So it is working in British Columbia at this time.

I come from what I call a small business, running a resort, and I know that when you're in a small business you're trying to do the job of running the business: satisfying your customers. You're generally not a lawyer, and you don't have the time to try to figure out all the various government regulations. We need rules that are simple, that are in plain language that business can understand and that are communicated to business so they understand them, and we need government to help business comply with the rules. The great majority of businesses out there want to live within the law, want to comply with the rules and want to do the best job they can. This bill is all about reducing the burden on business so it can thrive in this province. Small business is 96% of the business in this province. We need it to survive; we need it to thrive. I ask you to support this private member's bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The time for private members' public business has expired.

LONG-TERM CARE

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): We will first deal with ballot item number 55, standing in the name of Mr. Wilson.

Mr. Wilson has moved a private member's resolution. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, say “aye.”

All those opposed, say “nay.”

I believe the nays have it.

We'll deal with this at the end. We'll go through the other motions first.

POLICE OFFICERS

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The next item is ballot item number 56. Mr. Mauro has moved a private member's resolution. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Congratulations, Mr. Mauro.

RED TAPE REDUCTION POLICY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA POLITIQUE DE RÉDUCTION DES FORMALITÉS ADMINISTRATIVES

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath):

Finally, the next item is ballot item number 57. Mr. Miller has moved second reading of Bill 121, An Act to require consideration of a red tape reduction policy as a precondition for enacting bills and making regulations and to require a review of Acts and regulations from the viewpoint of the policy. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? The motion carries.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Congratulations, Mr. Miller. Is there a particular committee that you wanted this to be referred to, Mr Miller?

Mr. Norm Miller: I would like to refer it to the general government committee.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): So referred, to the general government committee.

We will now call in the members. This is going to be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1612 to 1617.

LONG-TERM CARE

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Mr. Wilson has moved private member's notice of motion number 62. All those in favour, please stand and remain standing while the Clerk records the vote.

Ayes

Colle, Mike	MacLeod, Lisa	Scott, Laurie
DiNovo, Cheri	Marchese, Rosario	Sergio, Mario
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Shurman, Peter
Hudak, Tim	Munro, Julia	Wilson, Jim
Klees, Frank	Prue, Michael	Witmer, Elizabeth
Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou	

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): All those opposed, please stand and remain standing while the Clerk records the vote.

Nays

Albanese, Laura	Hoy, Pat	Moridi, Reza
Arthurs, Wayne	Jaczek, Helena	Qaadri, Shafiq
Balkissoon, Bas	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramsay, David
Best, Margaret	Kular, Kuldeep	Ruprecht, Tony

Broten, Laurel C.
Brownell, Jim
Delaney, Bob
Dickson, Joe
Fonseca, Peter

Kwinter, Monte
Mangat, Amrit
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
Mitchell, Carol

Sandals, Liz
Smith, Monique
Sousa, Charles
Wynne, Kathleen O.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
The ayes are 17; the nays are 26.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES SERVICES À L'ENFANCE ET À LA FAMILLE

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 16, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 103, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and to make amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 103, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille et apportant des modifications à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

There being no further debate, Ms. Matthews has moved second reading of Bill 103. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): So ordered. Orders of the day?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Madam Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The Minister has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

The House now stands adjourned until Monday, November 24, at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1621.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
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Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
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Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
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Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
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Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
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Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby—Oshawa	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora—Rainy River	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West—Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest—Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges—Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton—Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
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Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea—Gore—Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean—Carleton	
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Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity—Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
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Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
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Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
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Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	

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O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
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Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds-Grenville	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
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Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
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		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
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Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton-Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto-Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga-Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services / Ministre des Petites Entreprises et des Services aux consommateurs
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permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle
Kim Craiton, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Michael Prue, Tony Ruprecht
Mario Sergio
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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vic Dhillon
Laurel C. Broten, Vic Dhillon
Cheri DiNovo, Helena Jaczek
Dave Levac, Shafiq Qaadri
Khalil Ramal, Laurie Scott
Peter Shurman
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Select Committee on Elections / Comité spécial des élections

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Howard Hampton, Greg Sorbara
Norman W. Sterling, David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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First Session, 39th Parliament

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Monday 24 November 2008

Lundi 24 novembre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 24 November 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 24 novembre 2008

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the non-denominational prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I would like everyone in the House to welcome two of my constituents from Orillia: Betsy Gross and John Armstrong. They're in the members' gallery.

Mr. Joe Dickson: We're going to welcome in just a couple of moments two grade 5 classes from St. Francis de Sales school in Ajax, with their teachers Jeff Shaw and Rob Fortin. The bright young students are from my Ajax-Pickering riding and have come to Queen's Park for a tour today. I must mention that St. Francis de Sales school is located next door to St. Francis de Sales church where my parents were married almost 70 years ago, and I just received this morning from the wonderful minister Gerry Phillips a history book, on St. Francis de Sales of 125 years, and he has family who live adjacent to that.

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to introduce the mother of page Sara Maltese, from the riding of Eglinton-Lawrence, Cathy Maltese; the father of page Sara Maltese, Frank Maltese; and the sister of page Sara, Francesca Maltese. Welcome to the gallery at Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of page Tess McGurn, I'd like to welcome her mother, Karen McGurn. She's sitting in the east members' gallery this morning. Welcome to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Minister, last Thursday, I believe during a media scrum, the Premier said that Ontario's auto industry would end up with fewer jobs than it currently has. We know the Premier is briefed every day. He's not going to engage in careless speculation, so we're assuming this is based on facts from perhaps Minister Bryant's ministry. Minister, could you indicate to the House what the expectation is on behalf of your government with respect to how many jobs you expect will be lost in

Ontario's auto industry as a result of the current situation?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Michael Bryant: The head of the Canadian Auto Workers Union has also said that the auto industry is going to contract, and in fact, that's going to mean fewer jobs. Are we able to provide a projection right now? No, we aren't. Have we received a projection from the industry? No, we haven't.

Part of the exercise that we're undertaking at this time is to obtain from the industry their plans in Ontario for the medium and long term in order to determine the viability of this industry and of the companies, and in turn, the effect it will have on the suppliers. As we receive that information, I'll certainly share it with the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'm not sure that too many people would agree with the Premier of the province speculating with respect to job losses in an industry that is currently facing such challenges.

I want to talk about ways that jobs can be created in this province, and we've raised these issues with you over the past number of years without much success. You have two programs in place: the advanced manufacturing investment strategy and the Next Generation of Jobs Fund. We're told there's at least \$1.5 billion in those funds unutilized, unallocated, to date. Will you commit to taking the money that's left on the table and use it for a real and meaningful jobs plan that will help unemployed Ontarians put food on their table?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Yes, the member is right, and I too want to talk about job creation. That is the purpose of the Next Generation of Jobs Fund and the purpose of the advanced manufacturing investment strategy.

I also want to say that the long-term future of the auto sector—we obviously expect and want that to be one that is going to grow over the long term. Obviously, in the short and medium term it's going to be facing particular challenges, but without the half-billion-dollar auto strategy that the Premier brought forward, we would not be in the situation where in fact we have some of the most competitive and productive manufacturing plants in the world. It is through the advanced manufacturing investment strategy, which has generated almost \$900 million in new investments—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I think there are many people in the province who would question the wisdom of some of those investments today.

We're not the only ones saying that the current jobs plan is a flop. People on the ground, people on the front lines—Cammie Peirce of the Chrysler Action Centre in Brampton told CBC Radio on November 10 that the second generation jobs plan was “arduous” because applicants had to prove they had no skills and couldn't get any type of job. The changes that were announced recently by the minister responsible don't seem to have done anything to address the situation.

Minister, the job losses are coming. Your current plan is not working. When is your government going to show some vision with respect to this area, real leadership, and put a jobs action plan in place that really works?

Hon. Michael Bryant: In fact, what the government did in the last budget was put in place—not in the midst of the current crisis, but in advance of that—a number of incentives: the tax incentives and also the spending incentives, the investments. Dalton McGuinty put that into place, the finance minister put that into place, in the spring budget. They are there now.

The retroactive elimination of the capital tax for the manufacturing industry was put in in the spring. It was of enormous assistance to that industry. The investment of \$90 million has transformed into 4,000 jobs under the manufacturing loan program. I would say, and I'm sure the member would agree, that those are good jobs, important jobs, and that is a success. The automotive investment strategy has brought into place \$7.5 billion in investments in Ontario.

We didn't wait for the crisis to take place—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: One hundred and forty thousand lost jobs in four years is not a success story by any definition.

1040

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: To the Minister of Transportation: As you know, Bill 126 has raised and continues to raise a lot of questions about how much thought and consultation went into the drafting of the bill. Under the bill—and I want to give you just one example here—a young soldier driving an armoured tank carrying an entire platoon in Afghanistan would be prevented from driving on Ontario roads with more than one unrelated passenger. I think that's an accurate analogy, Minister. Does that situation make any sense to you?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I think the people you should talk to in this regard are the safety partners in the province of Ontario who unanimously—I'm talking about people such as the police, and I know you have a great deal of respect for the Ontario Provincial Police and for local police services. I can't think of a member in this House who has more respect for those individuals and the

advice they would provide to us. They certainly were among those who provided this advice.

I should tell you as well that the Perry family, with whom I met, who lost a son who was one of five killed during the daytime in a van—and there was, to my knowledge, no drinking involved or anything of that nature, but it was young people driving with people together. That was one of the reasons we brought this forward. We look forward to the reaction and to the input of the entire province on this issue, and I think the member draws to our attention—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'll draw another example to the minister's attention. Under this bill—and you may be aware of this as well—a 19-year-old can qualify for a commercial pilot's licence. So in essence, an individual can fly a plane full of unrelated passengers, but under your bill, he couldn't drive more than one to the airport on Ontario's roads. Again, Minister, I ask you, does that make any sense to you at all?

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's interesting, what emerges from this. When there's an accident that takes place in the province, when young people are in a car and there's a race to the train tracks and four or five of them are killed, when there are some serious accidents where young people in our society are killed or maimed badly, or are involved in a huge damage accident—the first two being the most important—I would expect from the opposition that I'm going to get a question demanding, “What is the government going to do about that?”

Indeed, when you talk to Mothers Against Drunk Driving, when you talk to the Ontario Safety League, when you talk to the Insurance Bureau of Canada, when you talk to those who, on an ongoing basis, are concerned with these items, they provide this kind of advice. I say to the member, however, I'm certainly open to the kind of input that I always am on every bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I suspect there are elements of this bill that at the end of the day we can support, but there are others that are clearly ill-considered. It makes you wonder just who the minister and his colleagues consulted with in drafting this and how broad that consultation was. Did you consult, for example, with the young parent who under your bill would be prevented from carpooling his or her child with other youngsters in a vehicle to and from daycare?

Clearly, this bill was rushed, with limited consultation. So I ask the minister—and given the track record of this government, it's a legitimate concern—will he stand here today and assure us that this bill will have extensive public hearings across the province before final passage?

Hon. James J. Bradley: The member opposite was a House leader at one time, and a member of a government that—I hate to be provocative in this case, but unlike the previous government, which seldom allowed for public hearings, we in fact invite those kinds of public hearings and input from the public.

I would like to know whether the member feels that those parents who have had these difficult times, the many thousands, or hundreds, at least, of people who wrote to me about this specific issue, and all the safety partners out there who gave recommendations, including the Perry family, who on the day the announcement was made were really not interviewed to the same extent that some others were—yes, we want to hear from everyone who is in favour and opposed to get the best possible legislation.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is to the Acting Premier. On Friday, 22 mayors from across Ontario met to urge the McGuinty government to take action to assist the auto sector. They're very worried about the potential loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs and they are very worried that, for at least a few months now, the McGuinty government hasn't been sure of what it's doing. Since one Ontario auto job supports seven spinoff jobs, and hundreds of thousands of jobs are at stake, can the McGuinty government tell those worried mayors and worried workers what its strategy is?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Indeed, the member is absolutely right that the suppliers in the North American integrated auto industry that we have today are in fact being harmed substantially by all the activity taking place with respect to the automakers themselves. That is one of the reasons why we put into place the advanced manufacturing investment strategy. It was to provide assistance to the very companies that the member is speaking of, to allow them to make those upgrades and changes so that they can be even more competitive. That is to the benefit of those companies and to the benefit of the economy, as we increase the jobs through this important investment strategy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government continues to talk about some kind of strategy that was announced over three years ago. Since then, we've witnessed the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs and, these mayors are now saying, the potential loss of hundreds of thousands more.

Obviously, what the McGuinty government is talking about hasn't worked and isn't working. As Oakville Mayor Rob Burton put it, and I want to quote him, "We're on the cusp of a really bad place in economic history if we don't act."

What these mayors are asking and what literally hundreds of thousands of workers around this province are asking is, what is the McGuinty government's strategy for the auto sector now? Don't tell us about what you were thinking three years ago; obviously that didn't work. What's the strategy now?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I totally disagree with the member. The member seems to be suggesting that history will record that the current global economic crisis was caused by action or inaction by a Canadian provincial government. I think the member knows that that is nonsense.

This is affecting China, this is affecting Germany, this is affecting the United States and, yes, this is affecting Canada. It is because of the strategies that we've put in place that we already have the mechanisms to provide assistance and to provide investments. If the member's asking, "Are we creating greater flexibility with these programs in light of the current economic crisis?" the answer is absolutely yes, and that is to the benefit of those communities that the member speaks of, those companies that the member speaks of and of course the jobs created and the people of those communities, most importantly.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I guess I have to remind the McGuinty government that what these communities see is tens of thousands of jobs disappearing, in some cases thousands of jobs every week disappearing. So when the McGuinty government talks about a strategy that it announced three years ago, they're not impressed.

But equally, they're having a hard time figuring out what the McGuinty government's real position is. One day, the Premier boasts and says that the auto sector is worth investing in, and then this weekend he said, "Well, gee, you know, further investment in the auto sector might increase the deficit of the McGuinty government."

What is the real message here: Let jobs go because the McGuinty government's worried about the deficit, or invest in these jobs to sustain these jobs in these communities? Which is the real McGuinty message?

Hon. Michael Bryant: When the government made investments in these communities, I certainly didn't hear the member complain about those investments. In fact, but for those investments, we would not be in the position we are in and we would not have the programs and the dollars in place to provide this assistance. That led to an investment of \$100 million in Ford in Oakville that retained 4,000 jobs; the Ford Essex engine plant—investing \$17 million to reopen the plant with a more fuel-efficient engine production; and Chrysler Canada in Brampton and Windsor. These investments created jobs and they created programs that allowed these companies to access them.

Obviously, a reduction by a third to the sales of all cars in North America has had a negative impact on the industry, but this government has been there for them in the past and this government will continue to work with them in the future.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Howard Hampton: Again to the Deputy Premier—and I think people out there are wondering what

the McGuinty government's position is now, since you can't seem to get your message straight from one day to the next. What is also now clear is that the \$6.5-billion shortfall in the General Motors pension plan is only the tip of the iceberg, as pension plans across Ontario are in trouble.

1050

My question is this: People who have worked hard and followed the rules all their lives in this province are very worried about their pensions and about the security of their retirement. The McGuinty government has talked for five years about pensions. Can you tell us what assurances the McGuinty government can give to all those hundreds of thousands of people who are worried that they may not have a pension, or a much-diminished pension? What's the McGuinty government going to do to help those people who've—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Deputy?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: A number of initiatives have been undertaken by our government, including looking at long-term issues around pension reform. Mr. Arthurs presented his report last Thursday. There are some 142 recommendations that deal with a whole range of issues. This has been subject to a very extensive consultation over the course of the last year and a half involving employers, employees, members as well as pensioners themselves.

In terms of the short term, the issues are subject to discussions that are ongoing not only within fiscal, but finance ministers from across Canada will be discussing these as part of their meeting in December. There is a range of issues to look at.

I think the member wants to be careful that he doesn't unnecessarily cause alarm with people by torquing up his language—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I think the headline in the *Globe and Mail* speaks for itself—a \$6.5-billion deficit in the General Motors pension plan. All you have to do is look at any of the business pages to realize that hundreds, perhaps thousands, more pension plans are in trouble. I think all those people who are worried deserve a real answer from the McGuinty government. I welcome Professor Arthurs's paper. New Democrats have advocated many of those longer-term changes for some time.

But the question is this: There's a real short-term problem. Is the McGuinty government going to present a short-term plan for these pensions which are in trouble before we recess for Christmas, or are you going to simply push that issue off until some nebulous time in the future as well?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I would caution pensioners in Ontario not to listen too carefully to the member opposite, who is trying to stoke fears unnecessarily. There is no doubt that pension funds, like all other funds that

invest in various markets, have seen substantial hits this fall. That does not necessarily imply that there are solvency issues. It does require that governments look at a range of alternatives with respect to managing through these difficult circumstances.

But I would caution the member opposite not to unduly and unnecessarily inflame fear in people when in fact pension regulators across the country and around the world are looking at these—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government now wants to talk about fear. I'll tell you what people are worried about. At a time when literally hundreds of pension plans are potentially in trouble or are already in real trouble, and they're expecting some leadership from the McGuinty government, do you know what this Legislature is going to debate for the next four days? A partisan motion from the McGuinty government attacking the official opposition—no attention to pensions, no attention to pension plans that are potentially in trouble, but a very partisan motion from the government for the next four days. People have known for some time that the pension system was in trouble, for at least the last five years—no action from the McGuinty government. Are we going to see some action before Christmas or just more partisan motions attacking the opposition from the McGuinty government?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Just so the public understands that motion, the government wants the economic standing committee to travel Ontario to hear submissions on the economy, and both opposition parties are going to vote against that. Six weeks ago they were calling for a select committee; now they won't let the committee travel the province. I'm travelling the province. I have been and will continue to. The member opposite—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Leader of the third party, you just had the opportunity to ask the question. I would appreciate that you listen to the answer. Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite doesn't have to worry about pensions, I'll say that. The member opposite is irresponsible in what he's saying. There's no question that there have to be short-term initiatives undertaken. Canadian and provincial finance ministers are working on—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Labour. Last week you told an independent operator that, "Judith Andrew of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business never asked for a named insured system," but for many years now, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has asked for a named insured system to deal with people cheating the WSIB system, so I don't know why you'd make that statement.

In fact, in a CFIB election questionnaire, when asked if you would refrain from expanding mandatory WSIB coverage to include independent operators and direct the WSIB to implement a named insured system to deal with cheaters, Mr. McGuinty replied, "The WSIB is in the process of establishing a working group to examine the feasibility of a named insured system."

Minister, why aren't you doing what you said you would do and direct the WSIB to proceed with a named insured system to attack the cheaters, instead of your flawed Bill 119?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I've got to say to the member, he's got the wrong information. To that independent operator: The proposed legislation that we're putting forward, actually, would allow for named insured. We've been working with all stakeholders—with the CFIB, with labour groups, with employers, with employees—looking at a way that named insured could work within this proposed legislation.

The main thing we want is that all those who are on a construction site are covered. We want to make sure that if that independent operator—yes, that independent operator—is on that construction site, that they are covered by WSIB. But in regards to the named insured, we've had a working group over the year. I believe they've met about eight times. It has included labour, it has included employers, associations, different stakeholders working together to see what we can do within this proposed legislation. I say to the member again, yes, and to the CFIB—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Minister, you know that you don't need your Bill 119 to bring in a named insured system. In truth, since you've been appointed, you have not really bothered to consult with business. In fact, you left a voice mail for the CFIB saying that you were looking forward to working with them, but before your first meeting even took place, you announced to a union audience in Windsor that you intended to go ahead with mandatory WSIB coverage, contrary to your election promise. Judith Andrew, vice-president of the CFIB, wrote, "Cheating becomes much more difficult with named insurance. Regrettably, Bill 119 will help the cheaters prosper."

So Minister, this is contrary to what you've been saying about levelling the playing field. All you need to do to catch the non-participants is to bring in a named insurance program and have your auditors do their job. It begs the question: Why didn't you listen to anyone in business before you introduced Bill 119? Why did you only listen to union bosses?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to the member, maybe you didn't hear it the first time, but the proposed legislation does allow for named insured. But within this proposed legislation, this government feels strongly about the WSIB. It's a system that has been in place, a safety net to protect our construction workers and many other workers, for close to 100 years that we are steadfast on. We will work with stakeholders, work with employers, work

with labour groups, work with associations to see if we can strengthen the legislation and make sure that we strengthen that safety net. That's what we're here for, to make sure that those workers, when they go on to that construction site, are taken care of and that they're safe. Also, that businesses are playing on a level playing field and that everybody is paying their fair share.

1100

PUBLIC HEALTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Why has the minister allowed one third of Ontario medical officer of health positions to remain vacant, part-time or led by a temporary acting physician?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the chief medical officer of health for his annual report. In his report, Dr. Williams generally praises Ontario's health protection branch, the Minister of Health's three-year action plan to revitalize the public health system and the resulting improvements to Ontario's system.

The member raises an issue, which is a long-standing one in the province of Ontario, about the ability to attract, recruit and retain physicians to hold chief medical officer of health positions. I can tell you that quite recently, through the arrangements we have with the Ontario Medical Association, we've been able to negotiate one of the issues that has been identified, which is the compensation for particular physicians to assume these positions. That has been addressed. It's our hope, in working collaboratively with the Ontario Medical Association, to be in a position to attract, recruit and retain physicians to these—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Last week in his annual report, the province's acting chief medical officer of health pointed to the 13 vacancies as a serious problem in public health. The Ontario Medical Association has said that the lack of full-time, permanent, fully-qualified medical officers of health poses an enormous threat to the health of Ontarians, in that a single dysfunctional health unit could incubate a national epidemic—another SARS or another Walkerton. Is the minister absolutely sure that six years after the Walkerton inquiry recommended that vacant medical officer of health positions be filled expeditiously, the problem is simply salary, and that nothing more needs to be done to ensure that all public health units in the province are properly staffed?

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, it's not entirely salaries, nor have I ever made that claim. The member well knows that this is not an area that it is often a choice when physicians come out and practise in the medical profession. Oftentimes, they make a choice between some of the different areas of speciality that are available to them. That's why we have enhanced funding and revised the funding parameters for cost-shared educational bursary programs for perspective medical officers of health, in

order to make it more attractive to physicians who would want to practise in this particular area. The bursary program is designed to increase the supply of medical officers of health by attracting interested physicians. Back in March last year, my predecessor offered dedicated funding for up to five physicians who wished to pursue specialty training in community medicine or a master's in public health or equivalent. Part of HealthForceOntario, our group dedicated with—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Our government has proposed legislation that, if passed, will extend Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, WSIB, coverage to a broader group of the construction industry. I don't need to tell the minister that Bill 119 has been a popular topic of discussion of late, as well as an important issue for the construction industry for many years.

The critical question I have been asked in my community is: Why does Bill 119 make it mandatory for all executive officers to have the same insurance coverage as construction workers? I would ask the minister to respond to this question.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I would like to thank the member for the question and for the work she has been doing to promote health and safety in the construction workplace.

We have heard from a wide variety of construction associations, small businesses, and labour and employer groups during the development of this proposed legislation. Through those consultations, an overriding concern expressed to us was the potential misclassification of workers as executive officers. The misclassification of executive officers is currently being used as a way for employers to get out of paying coverage for their workers. We have heard about cases where an employer has gone to great lengths to misclassify construction staff as executive officers to avoid paying. We want to make sure that we close this loophole, but not unduly penalize legitimate executive officers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Minister, some feel that executive officers and partners in a partnership who do not work on construction sites should be exempt from having to pay mandatory coverage through WSIB. There is a clear difference between an executive officer working in the office on paperwork and one working on a construction site. Can we not find a way to potentially exclude executive officers who are not exposed to the risks of construction from having to pay premiums for WSIB?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: A great question, and I'd like to thank the member as well as MPPs Lou Rinaldi and Jeff Leal, and many others who have advocated on this issue.

Bill 119 has recently finished public hearings and will be going to clause-by-clause later today. We've been

listening to what MPPs, individual groups and associations have been saying on this issue, and I'm pleased to say that we have filed an amendment with the clerk that, if accepted, would amend the proposed legislation and allow the government a regulation-making power to exempt an individual executive officer or a partner who works exclusively in the office and not on a construction site.

To be clear, the misclassification of executive officers that is currently being used as a way for employers to get out of paying coverage for their workers cannot continue.

The government will work with business and labour groups before putting forward a regulation to ensure it meets the overall goals—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question?

PUBLIC HEALTH

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Health. There is widespread concern in this province, and there has been now for five years, at your failure, your government's failure, to ensure that the 13 vacancies in public health are filled. People are tired of your lame excuses. You failed to adopt my amendment calling for a plan of action in 2006.

I ask you today, what is your plan? And don't tell us it's more money. You've had five years and we've seen no results. The situation has gotten worse.

Hon. David Caplan: We do know the member's plan, as my colleague points out: a \$3-billion cut to health care in the province of Ontario. That's not going to be able to fill the vacancies, to provide the medical professionals we need. In fact, in the chief medical officer's report, he takes a look at the whole area of public health. He says that the ministry has done an excellent job in establishing the provincial infectious disease advisory committee; creating 14 regional infection control networks; increasing the share of funding for mandatory programs delivered through the 36 public health units to 75% from 2007—that's up from 50% when this member was in office; creating the emergency management unit to lead and support emergency management and activities for the health system; and establishing the Ontario health agency for health protection and promotion.

We have taken significant action to be able to deal with the public health challenges of Ontarians, as they would expect us to. Speaker—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I am horrified that this minister fails to recognize the gravity of the situation. The reality is, when you have situations like Walkerton, SARS and C. difficile, fast action by public health experts can mean the difference between life and death, and he fails to answer the question asked and then he puts out misleading information. We are not going to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Withdrawn.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: We are not going to withdraw \$3 billion from health. But I would ask this minister, when you're sitting in this House, Minister, perhaps you should be communicating and developing a plan of action to deal with the shortage of these health officials who can make the difference between life and death. Will you come back and give us a plan of action and demonstrate—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. David Caplan: In effect, the mendacity of the member opposite is well known.

I can tell you that a plan has been developed and in fact is being followed. As I mentioned earlier, through our recent negotiation with the Ontario Medical Association, in March 2007, for example, we offered dedicated funding for up to five physicians with which to pursue specialty training in community medicine or a master's in public health or administration.

Part of HealthForceOntario includes establishing a one-stop centre for internationally educated health professionals to obtain the information and the ability to enter into the health care system needed right throughout the province of Ontario.

The new salary structure I mentioned earlier will be developed and communicated to boards of health that are employing medical officers of health and associate medical officers of health.

This has been, as the member recognizes, a long-standing problem, but I think if the member, fairly, would want to acknowledge the kind of work and effort that has gone in—and even the chief medical officer himself recognizes that and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

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POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Since 650 Ontarians made submissions to the government's poverty website and this government has chosen not to release the submissions to the public, could this minister please share the key messages with this House.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me tell you that many of the submissions are, of course, publicly available. Those by organizations—they've posted them on their websites; they've circulated them broadly. When individuals made submissions to us, they made submissions to the committee. Overwhelmingly, people are telling us that reducing poverty should be a priority of this government, and I can assure them that reducing poverty is indeed a major priority of this government, reiterated over the weekend by the Premier in terms that were very clear and unequivocal.

We heard a number of suggestions. We heard about the importance of breaking the cycle of intergenerational

poverty. We heard about people who desperately wanted to move off social assistance into employment and they felt that the system was not there to support them. We heard a number of issues, and I'm sure in the supplementary I'll have an opportunity to talk more about that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: The minister says they are publicly available, and I guess that is true if you are willing to put down the \$150 and wait for 60 days through the freedom of information act. That's how they're publicly available and that's how the minister has chosen to do it.

Since the minister won't share the submissions and the key messages, we will, because we've been able to find out some of them. The most common recommendations were: more affordable housing; increases to ODSP and to OW; end the clawback of child benefits; raise the minimum wage above the poverty line; and affordable child care.

Those are the things people are talking about. Campaign 2000 calls for these same actions in a new child poverty report which came out on Friday.

My question: Why won't the minister commit to include these actions in the government's upcoming poverty plan?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to clarify that the member opposite does have the submissions, all of the submissions. He received them some time ago. There's nothing secret about them at all. But what I can tell you is that we are moving forward. I do understand that you're anxious to see what it is we're going to include in this strategy, and I know that people across the province are really waiting with great anticipation for the release of this strategy. We are on track to keep our commitment, which is to release the strategy by the end of the month.

I want to take this opportunity once again to thank people across the province for being engaged in this conversation and for changing the conversation. It wasn't very long ago when people were outside on the front lawn of Queen's Park trying to get in, protesting government. Today they are at the table working very hard, rolling up their sleeves in partnership with the government and others to develop the solutions that we all know we need to reduce poverty in this province.

POVERTY

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Before I ask the question, I want to thank the minister and commend her for her extremely hard work on this very difficult file, and I thank her for continuing to do the work.

Minister, addressing poverty in our province is something I continue to hear about from many of my constituents. That's why I was so pleased when the Premier appointed the province's first-ever cabinet committee on poverty reduction last year.

In my riding alone, I've held two public consultations about poverty reduction, one of them that the minister

attended. We had groups like Child Poverty Action Group, the Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa, ACORN, the Anti-Poverty Project, and I can go on, who attended that consultation and gave very positive feedback.

Last week, there was another report that underscored the importance of developing a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. Campaign 2000's 2008 report card on child poverty shows that while we are finally making—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: First of all, let me thank the member opposite from Ottawa Centre. He's been engaged in this in a very active way. I'd also like to commend him for his dashing new look. He is sporting a moustache in support of the fight against prostate cancer. Congratulations to you; I actually like the look.

I also want to take this opportunity to clarify: I think I misspoke. We will have the strategy released by the end of the year. So we are short weeks away from the release of the strategy.

Let me thank Campaign 2000. They have been tireless advocates on this issue for many, many years. They have done excellent work. They have helped inspire us to do better. We certainly recognize there is more to be done, and that's why we have struck the cabinet committee. That's why we are committed to measuring our progress. This report shows some of the progress that's already been made. The member opposite will know that it shows the data up to 2006. And we—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'll give you more time to finish your answer, and I ask all the members of the opposition to get on with working hard with this government in making sure that poverty ends in this province instead of just yelling and screaming and making things up.

With the uncertain economic times facing both Ontario and much of the world, many children in our province are at risk of falling into poverty. How will our government ensure that levels of child poverty will continue to be reduced in the future as they have been in the past two years?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to again refer back to the Campaign 2000 report. It shows that we are really making progress. There are 49,000 fewer kids in poverty than there were two years ago, 21,000 fewer in 2006 and 2005, a decrease of 6.1%, the second consecutive year the number has gone down. Prior to that, prior to our election, the number of kids in poverty continued to grow year after year.

It's also important to remember that this report does not capture some of the historic changes that we have made since 2006, most importantly, the Ontario child benefit. It does not capture increases in minimum wage. It does not capture increases in social assistance rates. So as we move forward, we will develop ways to measure poverty, and we will report back. We will work together to reduce poverty in this province.

CHILD PROTECTION

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: To the Minister of Education: I'm really pleased to see that your government has finally stepped up to address one small part of the system that failed Katelynn Sampson and allowed her to tragically fall through the cracks. Minister Bentley's announcement today is only one tiny piece of the problem. Unfortunately, more than one ministry failed this poor child. What investigations, if any, have you conducted into that school's failure to contact authorities and report Katelynn Sampson's prolonged absence prior to her death?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As the member opposite knows, I'm not going to comment on the specifics of that case. What I know the member is getting at is a question that has been raised by the party opposite a number of times, and that is on the issue of reporting.

I've been very clear that one of the reasons we re-engaged the safe schools action team, under the leadership of my parliamentary assistant, the member for Guelph, is that we wanted to be sure that given the numbers of pieces of legislation where reporting is required, there were no gaps, that personnel in schools were required to report when there was a serious incident. My parliamentary assistant is going to be bringing that report forward within next few weeks, and I look forward to getting those recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I am not asking for details of the case. I know that you can't provide them, and I would never ask. But a student on your watch, with documented behavioural problems and troubled learning, was missing from school for two months. The wounds on her body were not all fresh, and she was clearly struggling in the months leading up to her death.

You have policies in place, policy directives that principals and teachers across this province take seriously. They are disturbed by this child's death, as we are. Why have you not conducted an investigation into why Katelynn Sampson was abandoned and forgotten in this school and on your watch, and what measures would you undertake to prevent this from happening again?

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Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Obviously it is of great concern to everyone in our society that such a thing would happen. As I have said, I cannot talk about the specifics of any particular case, but what I can tell you is that when a child is not in school, there are attendance counsellors, there are superintendents and teachers and principals and education assistants, who are paying attention to that issue. Whenever a child in the province is not attending school, there are people in the system for whom that is a red flag.

I can't comment on the specifics of this case, but as I said, I am looking to the safe schools action team to give me advice on whether there are any gaps in reporting, whether in legislation or regulation or in policy, that we should be addressing.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question, of course, is to the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Last week, 200 grandparents and grandchildren made the long trek to Queen's Park, and 100 more rallied in their hometowns, to make sure that this minister heard their voices, heard the pain and suffering that her changes to temporary care assistance programs are causing in our communities.

When will the minister actually listen to all the voices of grandparents raising their grandchildren and reverse her ill-advised changes to the temporary care assistance program?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, let me clarify something. The member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek has said publicly many times that all the grandparents' temporary care assistance benefits are going to be cut off. That's not true. You repeated it on CHCH. All the members of the NDP, knowing that it's not true, are sitting there without saying anything. Those grandparents out there are getting upset, and rightly so, so that scare tactic should stop right away. The benefits are there to stay.

Do you know what? The member from Niagara had visitors; no one was cut off. The member from London-Fanshawe was visited by grandparents; no one was cut off. You yourself brought five grandparents last week—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: I just wonder, if she's so sure about her position, why she wouldn't debate me on TV on Friday night.

There are four prominent groups representing grandparents in Ontario. Last June, one group met with the minister, and the result was the punitive and devastating change to their meagre TCA funding.

What further devastation will this minister be wreaking upon these at-risk grandchildren after her meeting tomorrow with Minister Matthews? You're only meeting with one group of grandparents. Why aren't you meeting with them all? I don't know what you're up to.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: This member is saying things that are not true. I don't know if it's parliamentary to say it's not true, but it's not true. I am meeting with every grandparent who has asked to meet with me. Tomorrow, there is a group that has been asking me; I'm meeting with them.

When this member is saying that these benefits have been cut off—let's talk about facts. In Hamilton, in July, there were 181 cases. In October, in Hamilton, there were 185 cases on temporary care assistance. Province-wide, in July there were 4,027 cases; in October, there were 4,136 cases.

If there are grandparents who are not satisfied with the decision from the municipality, they should appeal it before the Social Benefits Tribunal. That's why the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Minister, research and innovation is a key part of our five-point plan on the economy. We recognize why it is so important to invest in innovation. We believe that when we innovate and when we are able to demonstrate that we have the latest, the best and the safest, we will attract business to our province. The future of the agriculture and food sector in particular depends on the benefit of a strong foundation of research in developing best practices and new innovative biotech and agri-food products.

The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs was in my riding of Guelph recently where she spoke at the official opening of the Bioproducts Discovery and Development Centre. Could the minister please explain to this House what work is being done at the University of Guelph by the research chair that will strengthen the agriculture and biotech sectors?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: We hear a great deal from our agriculture partners about the importance of research and innovation. I think the honourable member brings forward an opportunity for all of us to be aware of the good work that's going on at the University of Guelph.

Now, our government has provided a \$3-million endowment to the university to establish the Premier's research chair in biomaterials and transportation. Dr. Amar Mohanty was appointed as the research chair in 2007. He's an international leader and accomplished and very respected in his field of biomaterials. Our government has also provided \$5.9 million to the bio-car project through the Ministry of Research and Innovation, as well as \$6 million from OMAFRA for the Ontario Bioauto Council. Researchers are working on those areas that have been identified by industry stakeholders as key and important. We know that farmers in rural communities will directly benefit from these new opportunities and the new markets that will result, as a result—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Our government's innovation agenda is a fundamental part of our plan to move Ontario's economy forward. It will help us sustain the high quality of life that we enjoy today and create the high value jobs of the future. We are sending the message to the world that in my riding of Guelph, and right across this great province, we have a team of researchers and companies that are looking to export to international markets while at the same time giving Ontario farmers and companies a competitive advantage.

Our government has invested heavily in our partnership with the University of Guelph, a partnership that has yielded significant results over the many years and continues to be the central hub of agri-food research and innovation activities here in Ontario, creating jobs and increasing the productivity of the sector. Speaker, through you to the minister, could she tell this House more about

this partnership her ministry has with the University of Guelph and some of the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Interjections.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Perhaps members of the third party don't really appreciate the value of the very unique synergy that is in place between OMAFRA and the University of Guelph, but our industry partners value it greatly. In fact, what we have in place there is quite unique in Canada.

Our renewed partnership that was announced in April will provide \$300 million over the next five years for ongoing research and innovation in the agri-food sector. A Deloitte analysis of the economic impact of this type of partnership and investment concluded that \$54.8 million of OMAFRA funding will have an economic impact of more than \$1 billion for 2006-07. That is an investment that delivers results. The partnership is a unique combination of government, industry and academia, and some of the results that we can see in our—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of the Environment. The minister will be aware of a recent Globe and Mail article in which James Rusk reveals disturbing information concerning the activities of Environmental Defence Canada, specifically its costly challenges to decisions by the Ministry of Environment as well as the Ministry of Natural Resources. Mr. Rusk's research revealed that Environmental Defence, the Innisfil District Association and two private companies, where the direct financial interests at stake share common directors.

Will the minister tell the House what steps he has taken, or plans to take, in light of this information to ensure that the more than \$1 million in provincial funding received by Environmental Defence is in fact being used for the purposes it is intended and not to further private self-serving interests?

Hon. John Gerretsen: First of all, I'd like to thank the member for the question and thank him for providing me with a copy of the article a couple minutes ago. Obviously, we are concerned about issues like this. We will look into it, and advise him accordingly in the future. You know, our main concern within the Ministry of the Environment is to make sure that we have the best environmental circumstances for all of our citizens—whether we're talking about clean air, whether we're talking about the best land quality or whether we're talking about the best water system in the province. That's the main concern of the Ministry of the Environment. I'll look into these allegations and get back to him later on.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: I thank the minister for his undertaking. He will know, or should know, that the Friends of

the Greenbelt Foundation transferred some \$600,000 to Environmental Defence Canada. The Ontario Trillium Foundation transferred some \$537,000, and now we know, as a result of research, that Environmental Defence Canada is actually a very active participant in challenging the government before the Ontario Municipal Board. Surely, the minister will agree with us that that is irresponsible and cannot be condoned.

Will the minister agree to ask the Auditor General to do a comprehensive review of where this money from provincial coffers has gone, how many organizations it has filtered through and for what purposes it is being used?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Many grants are given to a lot of different organizations to look after the interests that they're primarily concerned with, whether we're talking about the environment or anywhere else. How they expend that money in order to further their particular cause, to make sure that, in this case, the environment is looked after in the best possible way, is up to them. If there are some inappropriate relationships there, then obviously that should be looked into. But I'm not willing to go as far as this member went, as far as making all these various suggestions or insinuations that he has made here. We will look into this matter and we will get back to him on this issue in the future.

ALCOHOL AND DRUG TREATMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Minister of Health Promotion: Does the minister intend to continue funding Focus Community project substance abuse prevention programs: yes or no?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I thank the member opposite for the question and I want the member opposite to know that the Ministry of Health Promotion is certainly intending to continue to look into programs that affect the young people of our province. We will continue to address the issues relating to prevention and addiction. It is a fundamental part of the ministry's mandate, which we continue to work on.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The McMurtry-Curling roots of violence report urges more funding for programs like these. Why is the long-running Focus program still waiting to hear its funding fate from the ministry when experts want more programs like this to tackle the roots of violence?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Again, I thank the member opposite for the question. Certainly the roots of violence report is something that is of fundamental importance. We are currently looking into and reviewing the report. We in the Ministry of Health Promotion, as well as across ministries in the government of Ontario, intend to address many of the issues that are raised in that report. We know that in addressing those issues, we will address some of the fundamental and present issues that affect people in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Health, in response to the supplementary, I believe, in consultation with the table and with the dictionary, used unparliamentary language.

Hon. David Caplan: I will withdraw, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Question period has ended. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1134 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Beginning now and throughout the afternoon, there are going to be a number of people representing different legal organizations, law commissions, bar associations and the like, and they're going to stream in. I just want the House to recognize and thank them for the hard work they do in the administration of justice.

Mr. David Zimmer: Although they haven't arrived yet, I would like to introduce Susan Thorning and Donna Rubin. They're from the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors and the Ontario Community Support Association. These individuals head up those two non-profit organizations that I just referred to, and they do great work for seniors and their residential requirements here in Ontario.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise in the House today in response to a request from the office of the Minister of Education. Minister Wynne's office has asked that we notify them about questions we're going to raise in question period so that she may be prepared. I rise today to serve notice to the minister that I will do no such thing, but I will continue to give a voice to those students and their families who have suffered through violence and abuse in our school system at the hands of fellow students.

When my office is contacted regarding yet another case of student-on-student violence, I will be coming to you, Minister, to demand once again that you legislate mandatory reporting in our schools. Your pat answer about increasing the number of adults or throwing money at the issue will be cold comfort to those students and families who trust you and whose families have been shattered by your failure to act.

You know the problem exists, you know that there are actions you can take to make a difference, and you choose to hide your head in the sand. Principals across Ontario should not be called out because of your failure to create province-wide legislation. They need your support. Minister, your office should consider this notice,

because our students deserve protection, they deserve justice and they deserve the fullest attention.

RADIO COMMUNAUTAIRE

M. Gilles Bisson: On a eu l'opportunité cette fin de semaine de célébrer 20 ans de succès de la radio CINN FM à Hearst, une radio communautaire qui fait partie de la communauté depuis 20 ans. Il est très important d'avoir une telle organisation dans notre communauté à Hearst et dans les environs. C'est non seulement là où on écoute de la belle musique, mais c'est aussi là où on a la chance d'écouter son député provincial quand il passe à travers les ondes faisant affaire avec les manchettes et les nouvelles de CINN FM. Mais plus important, c'est une radio communautaire, et c'est ça la clé. Ça donne la chance à la communauté de se voir à travers la radio et de s'assembler à travers la radio pour parler. Ce qui est important pour la communauté, c'est de laisser savoir aux gens de la région de Hearst ce qui se passe, quels événements vont y avoir lieu, et d'avoir une manière de rassembler les francophones de notre région.

Monsieur le président, je peux vous dire que le monde à Hearst est très content avec la radio CINN FM, comme les autres radios communautaires à travers la province, et on dit à CINN FM, bonne célébration.

CORNWALL COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

Mr. Jim Brownell: My riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry has always been a great place to live, with an unparalleled quality of life. It is an ideal place to raise a family, establish a business or take a holiday.

This has never been more true. With major infrastructure redevelopment and a strong sense of community, great things are happening and being recognized.

I was proud to see that the Cornwall Community Hospital recently received the Ontario Hospital Association's Healthy Hospital Innovators Award for the good work they are doing. This award recognizes the commitment of organizations to implement strategies that will aid in the development and sustainability of a healthy workplace.

The Cornwall Community Hospital was commended for its continued commitment toward its highest values, those being respect, teamwork, integrity and compassion through the day-to-day work of its staff. I would like to congratulate hospital CEO Jeanette Despatie and her team for the work they are doing to make the Cornwall Community Hospital such an outstanding facility.

As MPP for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, it is my privilege to continue working with the Cornwall Community Hospital board and staff, with the city of Cornwall and with the labour sector to ensure top-notch health care services and delivery for the people of Cornwall.

With the work being done at all three hospitals in Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, whether it be in Cornwall or Winchester, we will shortly have some of the finest health care facilities anywhere in Ontario.

ROAD SAFETY

Ms. Laurie Scott: I would like to share some comments and e-mails I have received since the introduction of Bill 126, the Road Safety Act, 2008.

From a 17-year-old resident: "I'm not sure why or how this part was thought up, but someone did not think it through. Is there not a climate crisis right now? Teenagers who planned on carpooling are now risking their licences. I will not be able to pick up my friends on the way to school in order to save them gas ... I now cannot volunteer to be the designated driver."

From a mother in rural Ontario: "Out here we drive 80 to 120 kilometres to play a game of hockey. In the city you have buses, taxis and the subway. Here we have nothing and everything is a drive. Pull your heads out of the city and don't make another law that hurts rural Ontario."

Another e-mail: "I understand the frustration behind the bill but this is the wrong way to handle this situation. Much consultation needs to be done before acting in haste."

We, in this Legislature, can all agree that the lives of young people are precious, and we should do what we can to learn from and help prevent further tragedies on our roads. But legislation needs to be sensible, reasonable and enforceable, as well as take into account the practicalities of living. The official opposition requests that the Minister of Transportation and the Premier ensure that a full slate of public input hearings is enabled, and this must include rural Ontario.

In my experience, I know that most young drivers take that privilege very seriously. They take their driver education and improvement courses, and they do their part to be responsible and safe young citizens. Bill 126 is a serious piece of legislation that will drastically change the law for Ontario's young drivers. Please let them be heard.

STARDUST BALL

Mr. Reza Moridi: On November 7, 2008, I had the pleasure of attending the Stardust Ball, organized by the York Central Hospital Foundation. Over the past 20 years, this event has raised more than \$4.5 million for capital improvements. This includes a new digital mammography unit and leading-edge surgical equipment, as well as construction that helped triple the size of the emergency department.

This year, the foundation has been able to raise over half a million dollars to purchase a safe intravenous infusion pump system, which will be installed in early 2009. Smart pumps are intelligent pumps programmed to ensure that patients receive the correct drug at the correct dose and at the correct infusion rate. Patient safety will be dramatically increased with the use of this equipment.

I would like to extend my congratulations to Nancy Coxford, chair of the York Central Hospital Foundation, along with the countless volunteers who have worked

tirelessly to make the Stardust Ball such a success. On a personal note, I offer my sincere thanks to Farsad Kiani, honorary chair of the gala, and Julie Fuda, chair of the gala, for their fine work.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Like many members, I have been receiving e-mails from concerned parents and youth who will be seriously disadvantaged by Bill 126 if it is implemented. The new restriction that drivers under the age of 22 are allowed only one passenger at a time in their vehicle does not take into consideration the impact on work, sports and even safety, such as teenagers acting as designated drivers. Especially in rural communities where public transportation is not always available, driving is a necessity.

One young driver wrote to me and said, "As a teenager myself, I can tell you that 'DDing' is a very common thing in Oxford county. A 'DD' is a person that drinks absolutely no alcohol, brings his/her friends to a party, stays there and drives their friends safely home."

With this bill, the likelihood of drinking and driving increases immensely. I'm sure this wasn't the government's intention.

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Another constituent of mine wrote: "I believe that it makes no common sense whatsoever to make drivers 21 and under drive in separate vehicles and eliminate carpooling. How are young people supposed to get to work, have designated drivers or travel with their friends?"

People are also pointing out the hypocrisy of this bill. The McGuinty government wants to cut down on carbon emissions, but this will increase the number of vehicles on the road.

This bill targets youth and punishes them without making our roads safer. Preventing carpooling, vacationing and designated driving, while creating more pollution, will be the result of the McGuinty government's poor planning that went into this legislation.

PROSTATE CANCER

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: For a few weeks now, I think some of my colleagues are wondering why I decided to sport a moustache all of a sudden. Some have the view that I'm trying to emulate the Speaker's good, charming looks; others are just too afraid to tell me that maybe that's not the look for me. But I want to share with the members of this Legislature that I'm participating in a charity event called Movember, the month formerly known as November. The idea behind this whole event is to grow a moustache in order to raise awareness about prostate cancer and to raise funds for prostate cancer research.

As we know, prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men. One in seven Canadian men is diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetime, and 4,300 Canadian men will die of prostate cancer this year alone. Some of our colleagues themselves have fought, quite bravely, prostate cancer.

I'm very proud of my team, called Moral Support. Two good friends in my riding in Ottawa Centre, Philip Andrade and Craig Haynes, are part of this team. We're out there in the community, raising funds and awareness about prostate cancer.

I also want to acknowledge some male staff in Minister Watson's and Minister Matthews's offices who are also growing their moustaches for this very good cause. So if you see them in the hallways and think, "Hmm, maybe a moustache is not the thing for you," thank them still for raising awareness for a very good cause.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: It is with great pleasure that I rise in the House today on National Housing Day to share with my colleagues and all Ontarians what the McGuinty government is doing to maintain social housing in Ontario.

In my riding and across Ontario, there are units of social housing that have fallen into disrepair. The previous government downloaded responsibilities for housing to our municipalities and provided zero funding to help maintain the housing stock in Ontario. The McGuinty government is back in the business of affordable housing. Municipalities across the province are busy allocating their share of the \$100-million investment in social housing repair funds from the 2008 budget. With this investment, Ontario municipalities are fixing leaks, repairing plumbing and ensuring units are more energy-efficient by installing new windows and doors. Toronto's share of this funding is \$36 million. Toronto's social housing tenants appreciated the government's investment in their housing stock.

On this National Housing Day, I want to congratulate the McGuinty government and the municipalities all over Ontario for investing in affordable housing. During these challenging economic times, investment in affordable housing will help our most vulnerable citizens through some tough times.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. David Zimmer: I'm pleased to rise today to acknowledge the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors. It's an independent organization that has effectively represented non-profit providers of long-term-care services and housing for seniors in this province for over 85 years.

I would also like to recognize the Ontario Community Support Association, whose membership consists of 360 not-for-profit home and community care agencies who help seniors and disabled individuals live at home. Both these organizations recognize that the long-term homes sector plays an important role in helping the government achieve its health care objectives. By providing our seniors with the health care attention they deserve, it plays an important role in helping the government maintain its mandate.

Colleagues, it's important that we learn about these organizations and the role they play in providing long-term care. I encourage you all to attend their reception in the Legislative dining room this evening at 5 o'clock. I want to particularly thank Donna Rubin and Susan Thorning, who are representatives of the organizations. They and their organizations are doing great things for Ontario's seniors, and I hope you will all attend the reception.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

FAMILY STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LE DROIT DE LA FAMILLE

Mr. Bentley moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 133, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to certain family law matters and to repeal the Domestic Violence Protection Act, 2000 / *Projet de loi 133, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne des questions de droit de la famille et abrogeant la Loi de 2000 sur la protection contre la violence familiale.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister for a short statement?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Defer to ministerial statements, please.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: We move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice be waived for ballot item 63.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

FAMILY LAW DROIT DE LA FAMILLE

Hon. Christopher Bentley: It's my privilege to rise in the House today to propose legislation that would, if passed, better protect and support Ontario children and families in times of family breakdown and distress.

Our new legislation would reform family justice for Ontarians by taking away some of the cost and stress that goes along with the difficult decisions made in our family courts. We are relentless in our determination to reform justice for Ontarians, be it criminal, civil or family, so they can find justice in their most difficult times of need.

Aujourd'hui, les réformes que nous proposons viennent en aide aux familles de l'Ontario, en particulier les femmes et les enfants, pendant qu'elles traversent certains des moments les plus pénibles et les plus personnels qu'elles rencontreront.

Our proposed reforms help Ontario families, particularly women and children, through some of the most painful and personal circumstances they will know. No one should live in fear in their own homes, which is why we're responding to over a decade of calls to change restraining order laws by expanding eligibility to protect those who've lived together for fewer than three years.

Our proposed legislation will also allow us to prosecute restraining order breaches under the Criminal Code. This change would allow for tougher enforcement by our police partners, and the accused would face stricter bail conditions. It's noteworthy that we're introducing this during Woman Abuse Prevention Month.

Those who speak out on behalf of the victims of woman abuse have wanted this reform for over a decade and there are many in this House—in fact, all in this House, of all parties, have stood and called for reform for over a decade and we're answering that call. I thank all my colleagues from every party for the tireless advocacy that they have been engaged in over the years. I thank the member from Durham—Mrs. Munro was here at the announcement—the member from Whitby—Oshawa, as well as my colleagues Minister Matthews, Minister Papatello and Laurel Broten for their long-standing advocacy in bringing this today.

I would also like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the many participants in the system of justice, in all the galleries—people who have tirelessly advocated for reform for years and are seeing it come to fruition. Without the tireless advocacy of all of them, we wouldn't be here today.

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A child is our most precious gift. The loss of a child, in tragic circumstances, shakes us with sadness and anger and moves us to ask: Why did this happen and what more can we do?

We entrust our courts with the responsibility of deciding what's in the best interests of a child when a non-parent wants custody. Before, very little evidence was required before this decision concerning our most vulnerable could be made. Now, if there's evidence of a violent history relevant to the ability to care for a child, we want the court to know about it. That's why our proposed reforms would protect children by requiring a sworn statement, and for non-parents, children's aid society information and the police records check, something specifically mentioned from a question earlier by the member from Whitby—Oshawa.

There's something else we're going to do for children. We propose to require annual financial disclosure where child support orders exist, making it easier to obtain fair child support payments. This change is another step toward making sure that good parents pay, and it will also go a long way to reducing family court battles and freeing up court time. Dans les cas de rupture de mariage, rien n'est plaisant ou facile. Our proposed reforms would allow families to spend less time and money on family court proceedings and more on getting on with life.

One of our most valuable assets to be divided between spouses is often a pension. The legal status quo is not clear about how to deal with pensions in circumstances of family breakdown, which adds to the stress and cost of prolonged court disputes. That's why, together with the Minister of Finance and pension experts and officials as well as the bar, we're proposing changes to clarify the division of pensions when marriages break down. By helping to sort out the value of pensions, we'll also free up valuable time in our courts. I'd like to make special mention of the great work done by the Law Commission of Ontario in proposing much of what will be found in the reforms.

Many of the changes today are the product of years of work by our justice partners in the Family Law Working Group, the bar association, Catulpa, the law society, the Advocates' Society and so many others. They're here with us today and we owe them a debt of gratitude.

This legislation will make the law fairer for families going through the anguish of marriage breakdown. It will reform family law to make it simpler and less expensive, strengthen the rules to help protect women and children, and I ask the members of this House to join me in supporting the proposed legislation.

FAMILY LAW

Mrs. Julia Munro: I am very pleased to be able to respond to today's announcement. We are happy to see that the government has, through this proposed legislation, addressed some of the very serious concerns and flaws in our current system. We're also very happy to see that the government is acting on the suggestions we made over the summer regarding non-parent child custodies.

On Sunday, August 3, 2008, seven-year-old Katelynn Sampson was found dead in the apartment of her guardian, Donna Irving. Irving was granted full and final custody of Katelynn Sampson this year; despite having many criminal convictions. Katelynn was supposed to be placed in Irving's custody while Sampson's biological mother straightened out her life.

Immediately after Katelynn Sampson's death, we as a caucus called for mandatory criminal checks in cases where someone other than the child's parent is applying for custody and the mandatory appointment of the Children's Lawyer to independently represent the child in these cases. Obviously we are pleased and certainly appreciate the recognition that we had made to the discussion. In looking back over the high-profile cases of

Jeffrey Baldwin and Katelynn Sampson, it becomes clear to everyone that many of the problems that had existed with the earlier case contributed in some ways to the Sampson case.

In the Baldwin case, the court was never made aware of his grandmother's criminal record; there was no requirement for the judge to ask. But I do have a question in the sense that Baldwin's grandparents were convicted over two years ago and the government waited, but they didn't wait for the court proceedings against Donna Irving to end before they announced these changes. I think it's a legitimate question, then, to ask why the difference in approach?

The announcement today is obviously one piece of the problem. Unfortunately, more than one ministry failed poor Katelynn Sampson. Today in the House, Joyce Savoline asked the Minister of Education what investigations, if any, had been conducted into the school's failure to contact authorities and report Katelynn Sampson's prolonged absence prior to her death. People will remember that she had been absent from school for two months and that the wounds on her body were not all fresh. She was clearly struggling in the months leading up to her death.

We recognize that today's announcement is a good first step, but we obviously have questions that will need to be answered as this legislation proceeds. Clearly, enforcement is the paramount piece. With all of these initiatives that are being proposed in this legislation comes the issue around enforcement. I think that part of that enforcement is also going to mean a significant allocation of funding, even in the areas, for instance, of training and being able to measure outcomes, to be able to say that we have in fact taken steps that are going to make a difference in people's lives.

There are some of the challenges around things like an annual financial disclosure. What happens if they don't show up? What happens if this kind of process breaks down? These are obviously things that the government is going to have to address.

I think one of the areas that is also very important to look at, as has been raised in the areas of pensions and custody, is access to the courts. Certainly, this is something that we have heard over and over again from people who are struggling through divorces and ongoing consultations and court hearings for custody. These are things that, frankly, bankrupt people and therefore, as a part of that, restrict the access.

In the final moment, I would just remind everyone that at the end of the day, we're talking about children who are abused, and that abuse is for life. We know the stats. They remain victims or they become abusers themselves. This is the task at hand.

FAMILY LAW

Mr. Peter Kormos: Like everyone else in this chamber, we in the NDP take these matters very, very seriously. We believe that this is an opportunity, in the course of the process of this bill, through second reading

and then into committee, to have some pretty extensive committee hearings. At the same time, we're concerned that this bill contains but half measures that don't fully address a very serious problem. In the short time allotted to it, Ms. Horwath is going to address this as children's critic for the NDP.

A restraining order is only a piece of paper to a violent party who has no intention of being bound by it. We've seen that far too often. After the deed has been done, after the assault has taken place, after the murder has been accomplished, calling the police does little to protect that woman or child. So we can't just talk about more accessible restraining orders. We have to talk about shelters for abused women. We have to talk about second-stage housing. We have to talk about the fact that most women who flee violent households are forced into a poverty that leaves them in a position where they're unable to care for their children. That's a great amount of leverage, and it has been used many a time to force a woman who's a victim back into that abusive home.

If you talk about the proposals with respect to the considerations for a court when considering an application for custody of a child, my goodness, to merely change the existing check-off-the-box application form with one where you check off the boxes and then swear it to be true doesn't seem to me to accomplish a great deal. We have to have, in the view of the NDP, an on-site inspection and the involvement of a professional, whether they're from child and family services or a similar child protection agency, to conduct subjective evaluations so that recommendations can be made to the court.

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A criminal record check, in and of itself, is not sufficient. A sworn application, in and of itself, is not sufficient. Those children who are the subjects of custody applications deserve and ought to have the full protection of that court. If they can't get it in that court, then where else are they going to get it?

We can't talk about protecting children unless we talk about major reforms to legal aid in Ontario so that, more often than not, women and children have access to legal counsel, because the reality is that there are precious few competent family lawyers who can afford to practise family law in our family courts on legal aid certificates.

We need adequate staffing of family clinics, and we need competent and experienced duty counsels working in our family courts. You've got to understand that the family courts here in Toronto and across this province have become but sausage factories. Cases are being processed so quickly and the pressures on the court, on the judges, on the staff, are so great that we're confident that there are lapses on a daily basis and children are being put at risk.

In the course of discussing this proposal, we have to talk about ensuring that we have adequate numbers of judges, that we have judges who are focused solely on family law matters, so they can develop the expertise and the sensitivities that are necessary. We need legal representation for people in those courts. We need an active

and more aggressive Office of the Children's Lawyer from the Ministry of the Attorney General. We need on-site examinations by trained professionals who can assist the court by making recommendations about the competency of the proposed custodial parent to fulfill that role in every respect.

FAMILY LAW

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I just want to echo the comments made by my colleague from the Welland riding.

The reality is, this is but a small piece of the puzzle, and this government knows this darned well, because during its term of office there have been a number of significant domestic violence cases that it has ignored, in terms of making real change. We have a Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services who is not prepared to call an inquest into the brutal murder of a young boy in Brantford. We have the death of Lori Dupont, resulting in jury recommendations that this government still has not acted on. The situation of domestic violence is epidemic in this province, yet the government has not acted quickly enough or far enough.

Absolutely, we'll look at the one piece of one side of the equation that is in these recommendations carefully, and we'll look for those committee hearings. But start acting on the things that will help women and their children flee situations of domestic violence: transitional housing, affordable housing, in neighbourhoods. That's what we need. That's what this government needs to act on.

PETITIONS

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have received more petitions to do with Bill 119 and I shall read it.

"Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 119, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008, which makes WSIB mandatory for independent operators, partners and executive officers in construction; and

"Whereas this bill will cost the average business owner about \$11,000 while doing nothing to catch cheaters in the underground economy; and

"Whereas this bill will do nothing to make workers safer in the workplace; and

"Whereas there has been insufficient consultation with construction companies and stakeholders to discuss the impact of this bill or other alternatives; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government refuses to allow discussion of this bill with the affected parties through the committee process;

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To revoke Bill 119 or to require the Standing Committee on Social Policy to travel across the province of Ontario in order to provide an opportunity for consultation with affected businesses."

I support this petition.

WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas workplace harassment (physical/psychological) and violence are linked to the mental and physical ill-health and safety of workers in Ontario; and

"Whereas harassment and violence need to be defined as violations of the Occupational Health and Safety Act so that it is dealt with as quickly and earnestly by employers as other health and safety issues; and

"Whereas employers will have a legal avenue and/or a legal obligation to deal with workplace harassment and violence in all its forms, including psychological harassment; and

"Whereas harassment poisons the workplace, taking many forms—verbal/physical abuse, sabotage, intimidation, bullying, sexism and racism, and should not be tolerated; and

"Whereas harassment in any form harms a target's physical and mental health, esteem and productivity, and contributes to trauma and stress on the job; and

"Whereas Bill 29 would make it the law to protect workers from workplace harassment by giving workers the right to refuse work after harassment has occurred, requiring the investigation of allegations of workplace-related harassment and oblige employers to take steps to prevent further occurrences of workplace-related harassment;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to treat workplace harassment and violence as a serious health and safety issue by passing MPP Andrea Horwath's Bill 29, which would bring workplace harassment and violence under the scope of the Occupational Health and Safety Act."

I agree with this; I'm sending it to the table by way of page Sara.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It's signed by a number of people, primarily in Erin Mills, and others from Oakville and Burlington. I especially want to thank Magda Moore of Berwell Road in Erin Mills for having sent this to me. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the

ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I agree wholeheartedly with this petition. I'm pleased to sign and support it and to ask page Jenna to carry it for me.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services, Madeleine Meilleur, has decided that grandparents caring for their grandchildren no longer qualify for temporary care assistance; and

"Whereas the removal of the temporary care assistance could mean that children will be forced into foster care; and

"Whereas the temporary care assistance amounted to \$231 per month, much less than a foster family would receive to look after the same children if they were forced into foster care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately reverse the decision to remove temporary care assistance for grandparents looking after their grandchildren."

I support this petition and am pleased to affix my signature to it.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Hamilton Health Sciences centre proposal to restructure health sciences includes plans to provide a children-only emergency room at the McMaster site;

"Whereas the closure of the Chedoke urgent care site has left over 170,000 Hamilton residents with the McMaster emergency room as the closest available emergency urgent care facility;

"Whereas there are over 170,000 residents in Hamilton that will be adversely affected by the closure of the McMaster emergency room;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health take all necessary steps to ensure that the LHIN postpone their decision for 60

days to allow for HHC to engage in 'comprehensive' consultations to answer the concerns of the many residents" of the Hamilton area "who are affected by this decision."

I support this, have signed it and send it with Tess to the table.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Bob Delaney: I am pleased to read this petition. It's addressed to the Parliament of Ontario, and it is a petition that I've been reading, along with my colleague from Newmarket-Aurora. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

"Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada's multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

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"Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario's diverse religious and cultural communities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the private member's bill entitled An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day."

There are a great many people from the city of Mississauga who have signed this. I join them in signing it, and ask page Sara to carry it for me.

INNISFIL EARLY YEARS CENTRE

Mrs. Julia Munro: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas on September 15, 2008, Simcoe Community Services announced that due to lack of funding by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the Ontario Early Years Centre Innisfil satellite location located at 8000 Yonge Street in Innisfil, Ontario, will be closing on November 30, 2008;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We respectfully request that the province of Ontario and its funding partners take any and all means necessary to provide an adequate level of funding on a consistent, ongoing basis to Simcoe Community Services for the purpose of keeping the Ontario Early Years Centre Innisfil satellite location open to the parents, caregivers and children of the town of Innisfil and surrounding communities."

As I am in agreement, I have affixed my signature and give it to Jason.

LUPUS

Mr. Bob Delaney: There seems to be a small fraternity reading petitions today. I'm pleased to read this

petition submitted by my seatmate, the hard-working member from Niagara Falls. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness;

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison to diseases of comparable magnitude and severity;

"Whereas no safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

I'm pleased to support the member for Niagara Falls, to affix my signature to this petition and to ask page Sarah to carry it for me.

HOSPICES

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas hospices on church or hospital property do not pay taxes;

"Whereas hospices are not-for-profit organizations providing emotional, spiritual and bereavement support and respite care to terminally ill individuals and their family members;

"Whereas a residential hospice (usually an eight- to 10-bed home-like facility) provides around-the-clock care to terminally ill individuals and support to their families;

"Whereas hospice services are provided free of charge;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow hospices across the province to be exempt from municipal taxes."

I agree with this and will send it with page Sarah to the table.

LOGGING ROUTE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a position to do with logging through the village of Restoule, and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Nipissing forest management plan proposes to use Hawthorne Drive in Restoule, which features a single-lane bridge and narrow and steep sections; and

"Whereas area residents have grave concerns about community safety, traffic speed, truck noise and general wear and tear of Hawthorne Drive and the bridge in the village of Restoule; and

"Whereas the proposed route travels past the Restoule Canadian Legion and two churches; and

"Whereas alternative routes are possible via Odorizzi Road and Block 09-056;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety and concerns of the people of Restoule ahead of logging interests and ensure an alternate route is selected for the Nipissing forest management plan."

I support this petition.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from a number of constituents in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents.

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act" as above "to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it with Brittney.

EMERGENCY DISPATCH SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with 911 services in Parry Sound and Muskoka. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is considering relocating emergency ambulance and fire dispatch services currently provided by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service to the city of Barrie; and

"Whereas up to 40% of all calls received are from cellphones from people unfamiliar with the area; and

"Whereas Parry Sound-Muskoka residents have grave concerns about the effect on emergency response times if dispatch services are provided by dispatchers who are not familiar with the area; and

"Whereas 16 Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care-funded jobs, held by qualified communication officers from local communities, may be lost as a result of the relocation of dispatch services to the city of Barrie,

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety, health and economic concerns of the people of Parry Sound-Muskoka ahead of government efficiency interests and ensure that emergency dispatch services continue to be provided locally by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service."

I support this petition.

TOM LONGBOAT

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario.

"Whereas Tom Longboat, a proud son of the Onondaga Nation, was one of the most internationally celebrated athletes in Canadian history;

"Whereas Tom Longboat was voted as the number one Canadian athlete of the 20th century by Maclean's magazine for his record-breaking marathon and long-distance triumphs against the world's best;

"Whereas Tom Longboat fought for his country in World War I and was wounded twice during his tour of duty;

"Whereas Tom Longboat is a proud symbol of the outstanding achievements and contributions of Canada's aboriginal people;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario."

I affix my name to this petition, as I support it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that, notwithstanding the order of the House dated May 1, 2008, for the purpose of conducting its 2009 pre-Budget consultation, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs shall have authority to meet and adjourn from place to place in Ontario during the week of December 15, 2008.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Probably normally most members would rise and say that they're pleased to be on their feet to speak to this motion or it's a privilege and honour to be able to speak to a motion. Let me just say on this one, I have the opportunity to speak to this motion.

As I understand it, this is a substantive motion that allows for up to eight and a half hours of debate. The critical part of the motion provides for the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to have the authority to meet and adjourn from place to place in Ontario during the week of December 15, 2008. I know that there are probably those in the Legislature, certainly past and maybe present, who could probably have any number of us sitting on the very edge of our chairs during a long and intense debate over whether or not a committee should meet and adjourn from place to place during December. There are those, probably, who would be sitting on the edge of their chairs listening raptly to all of the reasons why, or their blood pressure would be rising and they would be anxious to jump into the fray. I certainly wouldn't want to include myself among the history of orators in this place who could bring a motion of this nature to that kind of life.

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But it does give me an opportunity, as part of the motion, to speak, probably extensively, on the processes that we have the opportunity to use in this place by virtue of coming to some conclusion on how we'll conduct ourselves as a legislative committee. This matter is before us today primarily because we don't have the unanimous agreement of the three parties on when we should travel in Ontario. There's certainly no disagreement that we need to have pre-budget consultations; as a matter of fact, we have already begun that process. We began that process formally as a standing committee last Thursday, in which we spent the morning, prior to question period, and the afternoon as a standing committee, with all three parties that day, hearing from those in Ontario who were able or wanting to present here at Toronto. That was the first of our hearings. Given the opportunity a little later, I may just comment on the variety of deputations, the witnesses that we heard from as recently as last week.

We are scheduled currently to meet on December 4 and December 11 here in this place, at the Legislative Assembly, in the committee rooms just below us to continue that process of hearing from Ontarians, from organizations in Ontario—principally organizations. It's not the norm that we get large numbers of individuals wanting to present to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs on the pre-budget consultations for the development of a provincial budget. More often than not, it's organizations that want to be able to present to us.

I'm going to use some of the time to talk a little bit about the kind of process that we use. I'm going to go into a little more specific detail because this does require that through the work of all three parties—on the standing committee, we do have nine members, and from that, we draw one member from each of the three parties to act as a subcommittee. I know that virtually everyone

in this place is aware of those kinds of procedures, but there will be lots out there who may be watching us—the member from Trinity–Spadina often likes to say, “It’s 8 or 9 o’clock in the evening, and you may want to tune in in 15 minutes because I’ll be speaking then for 20 minutes” or 30 minutes or an hour, as the case might be. So for all those folks out there who may be tuned into the legislative channels who aren’t aware of the procedures that we might use in this place to come to some conclusion on some of the things we do, it might be of some general interest, because it’s not haphazard and it doesn’t happen by accident how we get to the places we get to.

The subcommittee report that was prepared was presented to the full committee at the beginning of its hearings last Thursday. I had the opportunity to present the subcommittee report, and it went like this:

Chairman, “Your subcommittee met on Thursday, October 30, 2008, to consider the method of proceeding on pre-budget consultations 2009, and recommends the following....” That was the preparatory clause that was presented so that people were aware of what it was that we were going to do. It was a result of that subcommittee meeting that this particular motion came before the committee with all of its addendum clauses.

Let me go through some of them; I could go through all of them:

First: “That the committee hold pre-budget consultations in Toronto on Thursday, November 20, 2008, Thursday, December 4, 2008, and Thursday, December 11, 2008.” That’s just the first subclause, and each of these had to be read into the record at the beginning of the committee hearing. So there’s probably no particular reason why the entire Legislature, all of whom are here today, shouldn’t have the opportunity to hear our subcommittee report as well.

We agreed on those three dates. As I said before, the first day was last Thursday—we read this into the record at that time—and we’re scheduled to meet again on Thursday, December 4.

The second bullet point says: “That the committee request authorization from the House leaders to meet during the week of December 15, 2008.” That’s the substantive part of the motion we have before us today: that we meet during the week of December 15, 2008.

The third bullet point references: “That the committee hold pre-budget consultations in Niagara Falls, Windsor, Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Ottawa during the week of December 15, 2008.”

That’s not part of the motion we have before us, but it is a result of the subcommittee discussion that went on, trying to see which communities in Ontario we felt it would be appropriate for the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to travel to this year to hear from a fairly broad cross-section of Ontarians, that covered some considerable geography and, in essence, tried to touch upon various parts of this province, as the committee does on an annual basis. In doing that, each of the parties in the discussion had an opportunity to put forward locations that they felt they might want to travel

to, that their caucus may feel they should be travelling to or where they felt there would be a large representation of interest in the province. By some consensus, we came to agreement on what those locations might and should be.

You can see from the listing of five that we, as a subcommittee, have put forward this year that we are travelling from the very southerly part of the province, on the Niagara peninsula—Niagara Falls—to Windsor, one of the manufacturing heartlands of this province. We know the struggles and tribulations that manufacturing is going through, so it’s important and appropriate that we travel to locations of that nature. Often, some of the organizations that would like to speak to us find it more appropriate, and obviously easier, to meet in their communities than travel here to Toronto. It also provides an opportunity, obviously, for the local media and local citizenry and/or supporters of the organizations to be in attendance at those hearings, which might not otherwise be quite as convenient here in Toronto.

We also want to travel on an annual basis—at least in my limited time, we have tried to travel throughout the province, and we’ve tried to travel to northern Ontario. Some would suggest that Sudbury is not northern Ontario. I would suggest that probably most of the folks north of Sudbury would sometimes think of Sudbury as being in southern Ontario. We certainly heard that on occasion in some of the more northerly communities. Thus, we make efforts to travel to communities such as Sudbury and Thunder Bay.

Often it’s said that we should be travelling to small communities. We’ve done that in my limited time as well; we’ve travelled to smaller communities. But there are constraints at times in doing that. There are a couple of things that factor in to it. One is that smaller communities have a rather limited population base to work from. We found, on occasion, that the level of interest from the communities is not substantial enough to fill up a complete day of hearings, and thus we end up having people travel larger distances, who could not be accommodated elsewhere, to arrive at these less populated smaller communities to make their deputation.

From a practical standpoint, particularly as we travel in northern Ontario, it’s important to find centres of activity that have ready transportation for those who have to travel back and forth, and that have a sufficient population base and organizational base of communities of interest to give us the input we need, particularly when you’re talking about budgetary considerations, either for public services or from tax standpoints or what the economy is like at this point. Larger communities give us a broader cross-section, at times, of what’s happening in a bigger geography.

There are some practical constraints too in where we can travel from the standpoint of smaller communities, particularly in northern Ontario, where we’re travelling long distances. I’ll give you an example.

My first year on the committee when we travelled was, I believe, three years ago. As the committee had its discussions, we thought it would be appropriate to travel

to Atikokan, in northwestern Ontario. The travel at that time was in late January and/or early February. We travelled from Toronto on two very small planes. As a matter of fact, the planes were small enough that we had to gas up or fuel up in Sault Ste. Marie because they couldn't carry enough fuel, with the seven or eight passengers that that particular plane would hold, to get us to Atikokan.

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We arrived in Atikokan and we were fortunate that the weather was relatively co-operative for that time of the year, because you can imagine in a relatively small airport, there's really no such thing as a hangar. I think there was, if I recall, a small building on-site; certainly no staffing of that particular facility. You called ahead and were met at the site by someone who could transport you to the location we were staying at some 30 miles or so, I think, or 20-odd miles, outside the town of Atikokan.

It was a great trip. It was wonderful to see that small community. But at the end of January, flying in two small planes into a relatively small airport and wondering whether we were going to get out the next day so that we could make the next stop on the tour presented its own challenges. As a matter of fact, after we landed, the plane left and I think went to Thunder Bay so it could be hangared for the night. They were obviously concerned about icing occurring, and if it had stayed in Atikokan overnight, we wouldn't have been able to de-ice because they don't have facilities, and thus we might not have gotten out of there.

So we make choices, as a subcommittee and committee, about the nature of travel around not only what communities it would be interesting to attend, but what communities it is practical, in part, for us to attend.

The fourth item on our subcommittee report: "That the committee clerk, in consultation with the Chair, post information regarding pre-budget consultations on the Ontario parliamentary channel and the committee's website."

Now, this is a pretty straightforward thing and it's pretty well agreed upon that we need to, obviously, get information out there as readily as we can about the nature of the work that the committee is going to do, the nature of the locations it's going to travel to and the timing of those locations so that people and organizations can begin thinking about whether or not they want to present. In many cases, they've already made up their mind in that regard, but it does frame it a little bit as to the time they might have available to them.

Item five in our subcommittee report: "That the committee clerk, in consultation with the Chair, place an advertisement, no later than the week of November 3, 2008, in a major newspaper of each of the cities in which the committee intends to meet, and that the advertisements be placed in both English and French papers where possible."

Again, when you read this stuff and you look at it, you think this is pretty straightforward, but each year, as we have the debate among the subcommittee, there is dis-

cussion around the nature and the extent of the advertising. We talk about whether we advertise in a single major newspaper or we advertise in two major newspapers. Do we advertise in community newspapers or just major dailies? Do we advertise in all communities in both official languages? Do we advertise in any papers in other than the two official languages?

Now, on paper, at the end of the day, it might seem like something pretty straightforward. Often the matters of structure and advertising become a matter of discussion among the three party members.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Talk about the economy.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I hear members opposite talking about, "What about the economy?" The motion before us, to stay to the motion before us, speaks to the committee on finance and economic affairs having the authority to meet and adjourn from place to place in Ontario during the week of December 15, and thus we're talking about the reasons and the rationale and the strategies by which we got to those decisions.

Sixth is, "That each party provide the committee clerk with the name of one expert witness and one alternate no later than November 27, 2008."

Each year, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs deliberately seeks out the opinions of experts. We don't solely ask the public at large and organizations if they want to make representation as witnesses, but we seek out experts in the field. Each of the three parties allocates an expert witness, and they come with different perspectives on the economy, and it makes for a very interesting part of the debate that goes on at that point in time. So each of the parties goes away to identify their expert witnesses and an alternate, to ensure that we have folks available.

This activity just doesn't happen casually. You don't suddenly decide to have a committee meeting one day and expect everyone to show up and for it to run smoothly. It's only when you have, ideally, full agreement that things work the best.

Seventh: "That expert witnesses be offered 15 minutes for their presentation, and be given five minutes of questioning from each political party."

We get pretty specific about how we articulate what it is that we want witnesses to be able to present, from the standpoint of time frame, and specific about what each party will be able to do from the standpoint of asking questions or commenting on the activities of the expert witness at this point in time.

The expert witnesses, we agree, can be quite concise when they're asked to be. If you gave them each an hour, they would be able, I'm sure, to fill that hour, providing us with information; if you gave them two hours, they could provide us with two hours of information. We've found, at least of late, that in this year, by this motion, 15 minutes is an adequate time for them to be concise in the context of that committee work, and provides an opportunity for each party to be able to ask questions of that particular expert.

Eighth on our subcommittee report: "That expert witnesses be scheduled to appear before the committee in

Toronto on Thursday, December 4, 2008, or Thursday, December 11, 2008, subject to their availability.”

It would seem to be, “Well, just whenever they’re available,” but that’s not the case. We have to have some agreement as to when best to hear those expert witnesses and where to hear those expert witnesses. This particular year, we decided that we would offer them two dates on which they could appear before the committee, and sent the committee clerk off to do that work.

As it turns out, two of those expert witnesses were available on one of those dates and the third was available on the alternate date. The committee clerk came back to the subcommittee members to advise us of that, because there might have been some expectation in our minds that it might be easy to coordinate all of these three individuals and organizations on the same day. We have agreed, as we laid out in our subcommittee report, that we would hear them on the days that they were available to us.

Ninth: “That interested people who wish to be considered to make an oral presentation in Toronto contact the committee clerk by 5 p.m. on ... November 17, 2008.” So in late October, we set out a time frame of about two and a half weeks, as the advertisement was being done in the parliamentary channel and the like, for people in Toronto to get to the clerk by a specific deadline if they wanted to make representation before the committee.

Interestingly enough, each of the parties, through the committee clerk or independently, was contacted by organizations that would have missed that deadline. The question was: “Well, I missed the deadline, you know. We just missed it by an hour. We were busy doing other things. Do you think that if you had unanimous agreement among the three parties, we could be heard on that day?”

That causes its own difficulties, because we may have one or we may have 10 organizations. There was actually one or more who were rejected for exactly that reason. We advised those groups that we will be travelling and they have an opportunity to make their submission to be heard at an alternate location, but not at their preferred location and not on their preferred date.

I don’t, off the top of my head, recall the numbers, but there was sufficient interest in the Toronto location that we had to prioritize the list of those who wanted to speak. We do that regularly, as well. Each party takes a look at the list; we have a fairly long list to prioritize. We give a list of alternates. The clerk takes it all, blends it all together, and to the extent possible, accommodates all of those people. And there will be some who might not be able to make an oral presentation to the committee.

Item 10 in our subcommittee report spoke to that issue of the subcommittee prioritizing the list of requests and returning it to the committee by 12 noon on Tuesday, November 18. So from the time we closed off the time for oral presentations and finalized the list, there was a short turnaround for each of the parties to be able to submit their prioritized list as well as alternates for the committee clerk to compile.

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We set some dates out: “That interested people who wish to be considered to make an oral presentation in Niagara Falls, Windsor, Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Ottawa contact the committee clerk by 5 p.m. on Friday, December 5, 2008.” Once again, we’re being pretty specific about giving lead time, putting deadlines on and getting advertising done so we can actually hear from people on the times that we had considered setting aside. Subject to how this motion pans out, we’ll be able to work through this. Similarly, item 12 spoke to the subcommittee members prioritizing those lists as well, not just the ones in Toronto.

We authorized the clerk through item 13 that “if all requests to appear can be scheduled in any location, the committee clerk can proceed to schedule all witnesses and no prioritized list will be required for that location.” In essence, if you have this much space in the day and you have enough space to take all the witnesses, then they’re all on. If you have too many witnesses and too little space, then it’s back to the three parties to prioritize the list.

Item 14 in our subcommittee report—these things are rarely short: “That the minimum number of requests to appear to warrant travel to a location be eight.” For the most part, our committee Chair, the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex, runs a tight ship during our committee hearings. He needs to. We want to hear from as many witnesses as we can in the time available and we want to be respectful of their time. We’ve run into occasions where we were preparing to travel to rather distant locations and found that there were only three, four or so interested witnesses. It hardly seemed reasonable for us to travel many hundreds of miles by air with a committee of nine, with a support staff of three or four from the clerks’ office, plus a single support staff from each of the three parties, plus the technical crew that’s necessary to set up and take down, plus the booking of space for the meeting, plus the booking of hotel space that would be required to stay over in those locations—turning it around in a day is just not practical either.

Over the past couple of years, we’ve begun to build into our processes, at the behest of the Chair, some minimum numbers to warrant travelling to a location, so we’re not leading witnesses and the community to think that we’re going to show up there if there’s not sufficient interest in doing that. It’s worked pretty well. We’ve actually managed, where there were only a couple of witnesses who were interested, to accommodate them through a teleconferencing methodology, and they’ve been satisfied. They’ve had their opportunity to present to the committee, they’ve made their written submissions, and we have avoided the unnecessary time, travel and cost of travelling to a location where there wasn’t sufficient interest.

The witnesses themselves—that’s in item 15: “That all witnesses be offered 10 minutes for their presentation, and that witnesses be scheduled in 15-minute intervals to allow for questions from committee members if neces-

sary.” Again, we’re pretty concise. We ask those who want to make presentations to the committee to do it in a concise and precise fashion. Almost all of them will provide a written submission as well, and their written submission is often far more lengthy. It offers background on their organization or it’s specific to the issue that they’re presenting at that period of time, but their presentation to us is kept concise, as are our questions, so that we can maximize the opportunity to hear from Ontarians during the travel and during the hearings that we have here in Toronto.

“Item 16: That the deadline for written submissions be 5 p.m. on Friday, January 16, 2009.” Not only do we have opportunity to make oral presentations, but there’s obviously the opportunity as well to make written submissions, all of which will be included in the report that ultimately comes to the Legislature and the minister. We put a deadline on that of mid-January, and there are reasons for doing those things in a timely fashion. It’s not over when those submissions arrive. There’s then the work to be done by the committee staff in consolidating that information, in extracting from it the recommendations coming forward from those organizations and ultimately, at the end of the day, translating that information into both official languages, finalizing the report of the subcommittee when it finishes this work and presenting it to this Legislature.

The interesting part of our legislative process that this committee uses is item 17. It says: “That, in order to ensure that all scheduled presenters are treated with respect and dealt with without delay during the committee’s public hearings on pre-budget consultations, the committee adopt the following procedures.” These are procedures for committee members, and they are bullet pointed:

First: “That notice be provided of any proposed motion that would refer to issues that would normally be included in the committee’s report-writing stage.” This simply says that if a committee member wants to propose a motion that refers to issues we would normally see at the report-writing stage, they can do that, but they have to give notice that they’re going to do it. We can’t bog down the time for witnesses by having procedural debates in the committee.

Second: “That notice of a proposed motion be tabled with the clerk in writing.” It’s not good enough for a committee member simply to say to the clerk, “Oh, by the way, I’m going to be proposing this motion when we get to the report-writing stage.” He can give notice of that intent, but he has to provide it in writing, so that the clerk doesn’t have to guess what the committee member intends to do.

Third: “That the committee postpone consideration of the proposed motion until the committee commences its report writing.” What that says, in effect, is that we don’t deal with those motions at that point in time. We don’t deal with motions at the point where it’s the public’s opportunity to present to us. We save those for a point in time when it’s simply the committee doing its final work, and deal with those motions at that point in time.

The final bullet point: “That adoption of the above notice procedure would not limit in any way the right of committee members to move any proposed motion during the committee’s report-writing stage.” This says that even though there’s a need to give notice of a motion and provide that notice in writing during the hearings stage, this doesn’t mean that any member of the committee will be frustrated in his capacity to bring forward a motion at the point in time when we’re doing our own work and there isn’t direct public engagement.

So we have some fairly extensive procedural activities for witnesses and for the operation of the committee, to ensure that their time in front of us is used efficiently and effectively for our purposes, and we have the opportunity to listen carefully and politely and respectfully to our witnesses and not get bogged down, some days, in the politics of committees. That gets us through some of the process up to the point where we have heard our witnesses.

Item 18 in our sub-committee report: “That the research officer provide a summary of the presentations by 12 noon on Monday, February 9, 2009.” Not only do we have a committee clerk; we have a research officer who provides support and help. It’s that research officer’s job to summarize all those many, many presentations we are hearing and put those into a summarized format and provide them to the committee in early February. This is not a short task; it’s not an afternoon’s work. It takes the research officer and the support staff considerable time to prepare this material for us.

Item 20: “That, in order to facilitate the committee’s work during report writing, proposed recommendations should be filed with the clerk of the committee by 12 noon on Friday, February 13, 2008.” This is to facilitate the committee’s work. We need to have recommendations from the various committee members, from the parties, presented to the committee ahead of time, and we put some deadlines on that as well.

As we started to hear our first witnesses on November 20, having met on a subcommittee more formally as early as October 30, 2008—and we even had some preliminary discussion prior to that. We’re now into the middle of February, a full three and a half months from where we started. The work of the committee is ongoing, to provide a report back to this Legislature for consideration by the minister in the development of his budget.

1420

“Item 21: That the committee meet for the purpose of report writing on Thursday, February 19, 2009.” We’ve completed the pre-hearing work, based on our subcommittee report and subject to the fact that the matter was item two, which was the referral; in effect, the request to the House leaders for authorization to meet during the week of December 15. But we meet as a committee at that point in time to do the report writing. That’s the opportunity for us to debate, consider and vote on the recommendations that are put before the committee, as well as the content of the report prepared by the staff research officer and others.

There are only two other items.

Item 22 speaks to the authorization of “one staff person from each recognized party to travel with the committee, space permitting, for the purpose of prebudget consultations, and that reasonable expenses incurred for travel, accommodation and meals be paid for by the committee upon receipt of a properly filed expense claim.” I don’t know when this started per se; my time is limited. It was in place; I don’t know if the words were quite that formal at that point in time. It says that when each of the parties has one or more members on the standing committee—the third party officially has one member—it doesn’t preclude other members from being at any of the hearings. Members of the Legislature are always welcome to sit at the table at committee hearings, although they won’t be voting members of that committee unless subbed in for that purpose. The third party has a member on the standing committee, the official opposition has two members on the standing committee, and the government side has five members and the Chair on that standing committee, for the nine. Having a staff person from each of the parties there to support their members is very helpful. It’s a means by which we can acquire information effectively on the fly, depending on how one looks at that, for our purposes when we’re hearing from witnesses, when we know witnesses are coming, when we’re following up. It’s helpful for them to be able to keep track, keep notes; also, to be another set of eye and ears on what we’re seeing as the priorities moving forward.

Finally, there is item 23, and that would be the end of our subcommittee report. This was read into the record on November 20 in our committee hearing: “That the committee clerk, in consultation with the Chair, be authorized prior to the adoption of the report of the subcommittee to commence making any preliminary arrangements necessary to facilitate the committee’s proceedings.” It’s a procedural kind of process. One would think that you don’t need to have that that, but it’s helpful. It’s helpful for us to authorize the clerk, in consultation with the Chair, to begin the processes necessary to facilitate the committee’s proceedings, even before the full committee adopts the subcommittee report. The subcommittee has three members; the full committee, nine members. The subcommittee reports to the full committee. In the interim, the advertising needs to be done. It’s not always efficient and easy to have the committee come together simply to adopt the report until the committee actually meets. So the clerk can go off and do some of the advertising. The clerk can begin to look for spaces in which we’re going to meet when we’re travelling. The clerk can begin to look for travel arrangements to get us there and back, and around and about—buses, planes, whatever it takes. The committee clerk can begin to look for accommodation for a fairly large group of people on occasion.

I mentioned a while back our trip to Atikokan, which was really very interesting. I can’t recall exactly how it fell out at that point in time, but we were looking for

space in Atikokan for a large group. We were expecting a large number of people to want to present, because to a large extent it is a resource-based community, whether it’s forest activity or hydro production. We were looking for space and the only thing they could reasonably find initially, I think, was the second floor of a building. Well, that wasn’t going to work, because second floors are not accessible. We as a committee and as a Legislature have an obligation to ensure that those who want to present to us can actually do that, and disabilities should not preclude someone from reasonable access to a committee hearing. So the clerk was left with the challenge of finding alternate space. One of the challenges is that space is booked up for various activities; not everything is available. So my recollection was that he negotiated with the local branch of the Legion, I believe, for the Legion hall to actually arrange for someone to either change the time or move their venue so that they could accommodate the work of the Legislature.

I have to compliment him, obviously, on the work he did in doing that. It was a nifty bit of negotiation that he did. We paid a little more for the room than they might normally charge on a given day, and everyone won. We had the space we needed; we were accessible; it was large enough to accommodate the number of people that we had—and there were quite a number; the Legion had their space filled, and they acquired some additional resource for that; and the folks who were going to use it were reasonably accommodated as well.

Each of these 23 numbered points, plus a few bullet points, may seem at times to be laborious, overly procedurally driven; some may say, “Why is it even necessary?” It’s probably necessary because we don’t always agree, and where we don’t agree is where the challenges come in to be able to operate in an effective and efficient manner. There are occasions in the committee hearings when one or more members from all sides of the House might query the Chair as to whether or not they can bring forward a particular motion at a point in time, because they think it would be opportune, apt or appropriate, and the committee Chair has the capacity to refer to the report adopted by the committee—and this is not a standing order, in essence, for committees, if I can use those words; this is drafted each time we go through it. A lot of it’s the same, but it gets a little tweaking. But he has the capacity to go back and say, “No, the committee has agreed that under item such-and-such we’ll report in this fashion, that you’ll provide your notices in writing to the committee clerk, not just a verbal notice of motion.”

So much of what is in here, I’m going to suggest—and I can be corrected—we probably have unanimous agreement on, among all three parties. On the subcommittee drafting and presenting its report, we certainly had majority support of the subcommittee. My recollection—and again, I stand to be corrected if need be, but I think when we actually took it to committee on Thursday the 20th, we may very well have had a majority of the parties in support of the subcommittee report, but I can’t recall exactly, and I leave it to others to clarify that, if need be.

So our real challenge is whether or not this committee travels for five days, from December 15 to December 19, to five locations in the province of Ontario to hear from a great number of Ontarian organizations primarily, but probably individuals, on their thoughts and their priorities about the 2009-10 fiscal year budget.

Most Ontarians, when they think of a budget year, think of a calendar year. We're kind of familiar with the calendar year as being the year in which you function. We know businesses don't always have calendar years and the province doesn't have a calendar year; it has a fiscal year that ends at the end of March and starts April 1, and runs in that time frame. So we talk about the budget year 2009-10, because it runs to March 31, 2010. There was a time, not so much recently, in the past couple of years, although I'm sure over the years that has varied too, where the province brought its budget in in April and May—and I'm not even sure whether there was ever any provincial budget brought in in June, but certainly April and May were not uncommon.

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We've made an effort during the past three or four budgets now to bring a budget to this Legislature before the end of the fiscal year. Now, in my days in municipal government that was always a laudable goal that we never really seemed to achieve: getting a budget before the council of the day before the end of December, as we worked on the calendar year. It's kind of nice if you can set out the strategy, the goals and the expectations before you actually start spending the money. It's really hard when you set your budget three months into the year, saying to folks, "We've changed course a little bit, but don't worry about it. We're three months into it now already."

Part of the challenge, part of the objective, has been to move the budget process so it better aligns with the fiscal year, so that our expectations for the coming year are being set out before the end of the fiscal year. I don't know what the minister's plans are this year. I know he started his consultations earlier than normal. I would anticipate that he would want to follow in the same manner as we've been doing the past few years; that's the presentation of a budget before the end of the fiscal year.

That presents its own set of rather unique challenges to the committee and the travel and reporting schedule of the committee. I was referencing during my comments earlier on that rather extensive subcommittee report about a variety of dates, starting in November, December, January and through to February. That kind of time is necessary to be the most effective. The lead time for the staff is important to be able to prepare the reports, so we have the report written, we have the translation done and we're able to present it back to this Legislature for consideration. It's in the hands of the minister as he continues the development of his budget. The longer it takes us to complete that work, the less time there is for consideration of the comments of the public to be included in the budget deliberations. It's often as though they're being held over for a year as opposed to being dealt with immediately.

I recall not so long ago—just a couple of years ago—where I thought we were backing up very, very close to bringing the committee report into the Legislature, and the minister's budget was pending within a matter of days or a couple of weeks. That hardly seemed to be adequate time, in my view, for the minister or this Legislature to be able to consider the matters of the committee's report prior to the budget being presented, let alone during the budget debate itself.

So I think at a time when budgets were accepted in April and May as being the norm, it might have been okay to do your consultations later and later. But strictly from the procedural standpoint, it makes eminent sense to try to get your consultations done earlier, complete your work and give the maximum amount of time for consideration of those inputs in developing the budgetary process that we work on.

I haven't talked at all to this point about what are some of the other drivers. Clearly, we're as anxious as anyone to hear from the public on the 2009 budget. We started that process. We started earlier this year with our Toronto hearings than we have in the past, and we're anxious to get out there and hear from them now. There's no question that people are ready and anxious to talk about the economic climate and the challenges that they face.

Interestingly enough, even from our first day of hearings—and I made mention of a few of the folks who came to speak us about their desire to ensure that their organizations and their particular interests remain a priority for the province of Ontario. That always sets particular challenges, because priorities and budgets usually mean an allocation of money. Where that's an allocation of new dollars—which no one is anticipating at this point there's going to be a lot of—or whether that's prioritized existing dollars, it becomes a bit of a challenge. We need the opportunity to be able to get those inputs at the earliest possible time.

You know, it wasn't too long ago as well that, traditionally, this House returned for its spring session in the middle or the latter part of March. We've changed that. We changed it in an informal way, I guess, for a couple of years by having the Legislature come back for a sitting in February. Now, with the new standing orders, we have formalized that even more. So it becomes increasingly important, as we streamline and structure the way we function here in the times that we function here, that we look at the work of the committees to accommodate the work of this Legislature as well. It would be my view, and I would put forward the premise, that by doing the work of the committee, this committee, in an expeditious fashion, at a time when people are attuned to the budget, attuned to what's going to happen next year—it's good for them, as well as it works well for us.

We're not the only ones, though. Although we're speaking today to the motion that will give us the authorization to travel during that week, we would have hoped that the House leaders, who this matter was requested of—because that's their jurisdiction—would have come

to a unanimous agreement, and we wouldn't have set aside the time for this debate. Again, I haven't been here all that long—five years. I don't recall debating a motion on when a committee should meet. I may be wrong about that; I don't recall it. I know there are motions brought forward that are more, I'll call them "omnibus"—a bad word sometimes—but a motion that comes forward saying that such-and-such a committee, or committees, be authorized to meet from place to place and adjourn from place to place in Ontario during the intersession, during the time that the Legislature is not sitting. We need to have the authorization of the Legislature to go off and do that work. I've seen those motions come forward, and they tend to be far more generic and accepted readily. I don't recall having to debate it. This is somewhat unique, that we're going to spend some many hours debating whether or not we travel the province of Ontario for five consecutive days in locations from Niagara Falls to Thunder Bay to Windsor to Ottawa, to hear from Ontarians about their priorities as related to budgetary matters.

I mentioned, because early on someone suggested that I talk about the budget but I really was here to talk about the economy—I was here to talk about the motion. The last time I rose on a motion—I wouldn't say not unlike this; I think it was a time allocation motion—the member opposite was chastising me by points of order that I deviated from the motion at hand. So I was hesitant to do that, because I certainly wouldn't want to have that transpire again. So let me just take a couple of minutes out, since we are talking about the finance and economic committee and the status of the 2009 budget, and speak to what we've heard already, because we did have the opportunity already to hear from a number of organizations, primarily, and even an individual who is a member of an organization, there on her behalf and on behalf of others but not as a direct representative of the organization that she's part of.

We had a deputation from Colleges Ontario. It's not unusual that this particular organization seeks to present itself before this legislative committee. As a matter of fact, there are a number of organizations that traditionally we can expect to want to present themselves before us: colleges, universities, health care, long-term care, nursing, municipalities—sometimes as individuals, occasionally as an organization such as AMO—occasionally firefighters, police, school boards, business organizations, manufacturers—

Interjection: Farmers.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs:—farmers, those in the resource industries. So we normally anticipate that we're going to hear from some of those organizations. I don't know what the year is, it may be a matter of location and their frame of reference may change, but we expect to hear from them.

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We heard from the Colleges of Ontario. They spoke to us, and I suggest they spoke well about the investments that we've been making in post-secondary education.

We're pleased with that. But they also spoke of what they felt was a disparity in some of the funding allocations between themselves and their peer group, universities. They felt there was some disadvantage to the colleges in respect to that funding allocation and they wanted as much assurance as they might be able to obtain through this process that they would not be disadvantaged further in light of today's economic climate. They talked about their successes in putting students in the workforce. They talked about businesses that are facing labour shortages, looking for college graduates over university graduates by a ratio of 6 to 1. They talked about what they are producing in the form of students ready to go into the workforce and why, even in tough budgetary times, economic times, we have to maintain a sense of priority investment in colleges. They also recognize there's probably not a lot of new money, so they wanted to make sure that the share allocated to them was a fair share.

We also heard from the Ontario Road Builders' Association, and they had a summary document they presented us with as part of their presentation to us. Among their recommendations, if I could paraphrase, was that this is not a time to neglect public infrastructure and neglect road construction. So they were saying, "In spite of the fact these are tough economic times and you're faced with economic challenges, infrastructure is a priority you should be investing in." As we understand, they were saying, "There's not a lot of new money, but make sure that the money you have is used wisely and make sure the wise use of that includes investment in infrastructure so that when we come through this economic climate, we'll be well positioned to go forward."

So you might see a modest theme beginning to develop over just the first two presentations I've referenced, the colleges saying, "We know there's not much new money, if any, but we want to make sure you understand the priority of college education and what we provide to the workforce, and as we come out of this economic climate and the labour shortage it's going to be the colleges that are going to provide the workers that are going to fill those vacancies." And the road builders are saying, "In these tough economic times, we know there's not a lot of new money available, but the money that you have, make sure you prioritize it in the right way, and infrastructure is one of those priorities, and roads are a critical, important part of that as we come out of this economic climate that we're in, to be ready for the new economy." So you may see a bit of a train of thought by our presenters already developing as they make their case before us.

We had a presentation a week ago, Thursday, from the Association of International Automobile Manufacturers of Canada—AIAMC. This is a familiar group. These are folks that we hear from on an annual basis, and all three parties and government hear from them on a pretty regular basis, as we keep tabs on what is happening in the automotive economy. This organization is not the Big Three, as we refer to the Detroit three, the Big Three. I want to be sure that I get all of the group intact, or I'll

miss some otherwise. Membership includes BMW Canada, Honda Canada, Hyundai Canada, Kia Canada, Mazda Canada, Mercedes-Benz Canada, Mitsubishi Motors Sales of Canada, Nissan Canada, Porsche Canada, Subaru Canada, Suzuki Canada, Toyota Canada and Volkswagen Group Canada, so a pretty extensive listing of auto organizations that play an important part in our economy, both from the standpoint that some of their products are manufactured or assembled here, but also the downstream. Whether it's the dealer networks that sell the vehicles or service said vehicles, whether it's part suppliers, whether it's the service folks at the end of the day that service these vehicles over the long-term, they play an important part in the economy.

Their basic message to us was, "We're doing okay." There were more saying, "We're not the Detroit Three and we're not at that table with the Detroit Three, but we understand and are experiencing the issues of the auto industry in the world and in North America and in Canada, and if the determination is made that the Detroit Three need help, we can accept and understand that, but don't do it on our backs. In these tough economic climates, if you have to invest in priorities and if those priorities are the Detroit Three, don't do it at our expense." Does that sound a bit like the road builders? Tough economic times, not much money to spend, if you have to spend it, prioritize it and make sure that you consider as a priority roads and infrastructure—a little modification, but a bit of a theme.

We heard from the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, and many of you in this place will know those folks and have met with them individually or collectively as they advocate for affordable housing, housing that can be available to families often on a more modest income. They're urging the government to continue its work on the affordable housing front, suggesting or even urging the government to expedite some of the commitments that have been made; some of those that we have yet been unable to fully accommodate. They're pretty precise in saying, in tough economic times when money is short and you have to choose priorities, don't forget about housing, because housing is a good investment. Not only does it create opportunities for labour to build new products and or bring existing products up to current standards, but it provides shelter for those who might not otherwise be able to afford adequate shelter. So in tough economic times when money is short, there may not be new money and you have to prioritize, don't forget how important affordable housing is, because we wouldn't want to fall behind.

We heard from Canada's chemical producers—and this is just our first day. This is one day at Queen's Park; this is not weeks of deliberation. This process works tightly, it allows people to make their representations, it allows us to gather the data and it allows us to begin to synthesize it.

We heard from the Canadian Chemical Producers' Association, and they're referencing their role in being productive in competitive enhancements in tough eco-

nomic times, that they bring value-added manufacturing. They brought some fairly specific recommendations, and those included tax concessions. We're going to hear, during our deliberations, from a great variety of folks—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I join in with my applause for my colleague from Pickering–Scarborough East. I enjoyed his comments on committee meetings 101. I wish I had had that when I started. I do look forward to the time ahead with my colleague from Pickering–Scarborough East and my colleague from Beaches–East York, the critic for the third party. Of course, the speaker just before me, from Pickering–Scarborough East, is the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, so we spent a lot of time together, the three of us and other committee members—my colleague from Haldimand–Norfolk, Toby Barrett, and Ted Arnott, from Wellington–Halton Hills—and we always enjoy hearing from the various groups and individuals who come forward with their suggestions that we then relay to the Minister of Finance for his upcoming budget.

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I think this would be the third time the three of us have done this—the three of us, at least—and I know Toby has been on the committee for a number of years, as has Mr. Arnott.

But there is a difference that I want to speak to, and that's why I rise in debate on this motion before the assembly. For the first time in recent memory, the pre-budget committee consultations, the committee listening to delegates, will end in December. Typically in January, February, and even, in the past, in March, the committee has gone out to various communities to listen, whether you're in Ottawa or Windsor, or in Niagara, where I'm from, to hear what groups and individuals have to say. But this year, for the first time in recent memory, the committee hearings will stop on—let me think about this—Friday, December 19.

The concern that I'm going to bring forward in my remarks—and I look forward to other speakers from the PC caucus; I know Garfield Dunlop from Simcoe North will be speaking after me on behalf of the PC caucus—is that it does give the appearance that the McGuinty government is trying to bury the committee hearings under the shadow of the Christmas season. This is the Friday before Christmas that the committee hearings will be taking place, the week before, when a lot of individuals will be looking forward to the holidays and they'll be completing other work. We do have concern that we won't hear from all of the groups or individuals, live and in person, that we have in the past at these hearings. So I want to raise that concern, and I'll get into some more details momentarily.

Second, not only do we have the fear—well, "fear" is not the right word for it—the significant concern that the Liberals are trying to bury the finance committee's consultations under the shadow of the Christmas season, but we think that by ending the hearings at that point in

time, when the economic news seems to be changing by the day, becoming increasingly dramatic, we will not have the opportunity to present our best advice for the finance minister, who will do a budget some time in mid- or late March, because who knows what will have transpired in that short period of time?

I know my colleague from Oshawa, who is here in the assembly, has great concerns about the auto sector: a lot of jobs in his riding; a lot of families impacted by the auto sector. And we see every day several new headlines about the future of GM, Chrysler and Ford, let alone the parts manufacturers. Who knows what kind of condition they'll be in, in March?

I think it would be much more sensible for us to be hearing advice in the run-up to the budget, to give much more contemporary thoughts to the finance minister, and that's why we are objecting to the motion that is on the floor before us this afternoon.

Let me illustrate by way of some examples. Here is, from the last month or so, a survey of newspaper headlines. Karen Howlett's article in the *Globe and Mail* of October 23, roughly a month ago, a headline: "Ontario Runs Deficit as BC Slashes Taxes." That's on page 1 of the *Globe and Mail*. A follow-up story from Ms. Howlett the next day, October 24: "Brace for Bad Budget News, McGuinty Warns."

November 4, page A4, a shocking headline for many of us: "Struggling Ontario Joins Have-not Ranks." I mean, who ever would have expected that we would contemplate the news or read in our newspapers in the morning that Ontario, which had always been the engine of growth, the biggest job producer and wealth creator in all of Confederation, which had never in its history received equalization payments, would be joining the ranks of have-not provinces, due in significant part to the harmful and outdated tax-and-spend policies of the McGuinty government?

Steven Chase, *Globe and Mail*, November 4: "From Have to Have-not." Mr. Chase walks through what happened in Ontario's recent decline to become a have-not province.

Murray Campbell, November 8, 2008: "McGuinty's Challenge Grows Heavier by the Day." Of course, that's also in the *Globe and Mail*.

National Post, Monday, November 17, front page story: "Face the Facts: It's Going to Get Ugly," by Jacqueline Thorpe.

Mr. Campbell's column, November 20, 2008: "Auto Makers Presenting McGuinty with His Worst Crisis Yet."

Monday, November 24, "Canada May Be in Recession: Flaherty," referring of course to federal finance minister Jim Flaherty. That's David Akin—National Post that day.

On the same day, November 24, Financial Post: "RBC Takes \$1.6-Billion Hit Amid Credit Crisis."

Jamie Sturgeon of the Financial Post, Monday, November 24, 2008, the same day: "Consumer Confidence at Recessionary Levels."

That's just a small survey of the headlines that we've seen in the last month alone. If you were to compare those headlines to the month previous, you would not have seen the increasingly dire characterization of the economic news that is buffeting Ontario and our country as well.

I do worry, as we complete our hearings in December, that there'll be even more dramatic news happening in January and February that I do believe that the finance committee should be paying attention to and offering recommendations on so that our advice is as current as is possible. That's why I believe we should return to the tradition of the Legislature that the finance committee would travel in the new year and provide the best possible advice for the minister.

The current schedule, as my colleague from Pickering-Scarborough East has said: December 15, we're in Niagara Falls, the 16th in Windsor, the 17th in Thunder Bay, the 18th in Sudbury, the 19th in Ottawa and then that's it; that's all she wrote, so to speak. We are hitting five corners of the province; we're hitting five major centres that I hope will attract regional interest as well. But I have to believe that as we get closer to Christmas, particularly, and other holidays being celebrated around that time, the ability of deputations to give us their best efforts will be challenged. I do hope that through our debate today we will revisit the decision of the committee to host those hearings in the shadow of Christmas and move them back to the traditional time in January and February.

I do want to note for the record that I find my relationship with the member from Pickering-Scarborough East and the member from Beaches-East York to be highly collegial. I think that we work well together in allowing for full and open debate at the committee. In a general sense, I did vote against the subcommittee report and expressed my concerns as well here in the assembly today. I do know that my colleague Mr. Barrett at committee voted against the subcommittee report. But we don't have the votes. Liberal members have the votes, and I do worry that it's part of the McGuinty government's plan to try to limit debate, to limit the participation of the opposition parties in the ongoing economic news. And who knows if they will prorogue the House as we head into 2009, and limit debate as we head into February and March? Under the new schedule, of course, we're scheduled to come back in mid-February. We'll see if that's actually the case or not.

A harbinger of this was probably the resolution that my colleague Mr. Arnott from Waterloo-Wellington had brought forward both at committee and here in the assembly—it actually passed—calling on the government to I think work with opposition parties and come forward with an economic plan. Mr. Arnott was well ahead of the game. This was a couple of years ago when he put this on the floor, seeing, if you will, the canary in the coal mine of manufacturing sites shutting down, laying folks off across the province. I think if Ted's advice had been followed by the powers that be in the Premier's office,

we could have done some good work together and offered very sensible advice that may have helped curtail the situation and may have helped curtail Ontario plunging over the cliff into have-not status.

Let me give you examples just to back this up. I know some of the members in the assembly have been around since this point in time; others are more recently elected. In 2000, to get ready for the 2001-02 budget, the committee met on the following dates: February 15 in Niagara Falls, February 16 in Toronto, March 6 in Toronto, March 8 in Toronto. So we were on the road in 2000, and actually also had Toronto-based consultations here at Queen's Park well into the new year as the budget was being prepared for that spring.

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The following year, 2001, for the 2001-02 budget, had the following dates: February 13, Toronto; February 14, Toronto; February 15, Thunder Bay; February 16, Toronto; February 19, Ottawa; February 20, London; and February 21 and 22 in Toronto. Again, the advice the finance committee would have provided to the then-finance minister—for the 2002 budget I think it was Janet Ecker—would have been quite close to her decision-making on the budget and would have given very recent input based on deputations across the province, having travelled in February 2001.

Oh, let me go on. I apologize; there were more dates in 2002. For the record: March 4 and 5 in Toronto; March 6 in Cobourg; March 7 in Waterloo; March 8 in Barrie; and April 4 in Toronto. So there was quite an aggressive schedule of committee hearings travelling to a number of different locations in addition to Toronto, some of which we haven't had a chance to visit recently.

In 2003: On January 27, 28, 29 and 30, the Toronto hearings took place; February 3 in London; February 4 in Sudbury; February 5 in Thunder Bay; February 6 in Ottawa. There was a small hiatus, and then it returned to the road on February 20 in Toronto as well. Once again, there were hearings in different corners of the province and major regional centres, in addition to Toronto, that took place in February of that year to give advice on the 2003-04 budget.

That fall, of course, the election took place. There was a new government. Dalton McGuinty became the Premier. Greg Sorbara was the then-finance minister. Was Mr. Arthurs the parliamentary assistant? No, you didn't start out there. You started out in municipal affairs, given your work as mayor and such. The parliamentary assistant at that time was Mike Colle, if I recall, so Mr. Colle would have led the consultations in support of the finance minister.

The Liberals followed a similar pattern to the previous Progressive Conservative government. In 2004: January 26 in Toronto; January 27 in Niagara Falls; January 28 in London; January 29 in Windsor; February 2 in Toronto; February 3 in Ottawa; February 4 in Timmins; February 5 in Thunder Bay; February 9 in Peterborough; February 10 and 11 in Toronto; February 12 in Kitchener-Waterloo. The committee then reconvened on March 10

in Toronto. Again, there were some rather extensive hearings both in Toronto and several different centres, at least six or seven outside of Toronto, that took place in February 2004 under the then-recently elected Liberal government.

For the next fiscal year, for the 2005-06 budget, again they began in January: January 10 in Sault Ste. Marie; January 11 in Sudbury; January 12 in Ottawa; January 13 in Kingston; January 17 in London; January 18 and 19 in Toronto; January 29 in Whitby; and on February 17 they reconvened in Toronto. So you had the committee travelling in mid-January to give advice to then-finance minister Sorbara, who I believe was still at the helm at that point in time.

I think folks know where I'm going with this, but let me—oh, we'll go though 2006 as well. My friend from Pickering-Scarborough East had mentioned Atikokan. Mayor Dennis Brown did a very good job, along with the Legion, the chamber and such, in hosting us in Atikokan. It was quite interesting to go to a small northwestern Ontario community to hear directly about the very real concerns they had at that point in time and would share today on the energy and manufacturing job losses and the devastation in the forest sector across our province. We were in Atikokan on January 25; in Timmins on January 26; in Cornwall on January 27; in Niagara Falls on January 30; in Sarnia on January 31; in Kitchener-Waterloo on February 1; in Toronto on February 2; then reconvening in Toronto on February 20. I imagine that was probably for report writing back in Toronto.

In 2007: January 22 in Windsor; January 23 in Kenora; January 24 in North Bay; January 25 in Ottawa; January 29 in Hamilton; January 30 in Toronto; January 31 in Belleville; February 1 in Barrie; and on February 22 they convened in Toronto, probably to summarize the work.

Once again the Liberals for several years had continued the same pattern of the previous PC government by travelling into the new year. Last year, as we conducted our pre-budget consultations in 2008 for the 2008-09 budget: January 21 in Toronto, the 22nd in Sault Ste. Marie, the 23rd in Timmins, the 24th in Thunder Bay, the 28th in Toronto, the 29th in Kingston, the 30th in Guelph, the 31st in London; and then March 31 for report writing, presumably in Toronto.

I'm pleased that folks bore with me through that length, but I did want to demonstrate that it has been the tradition of the finance committee for a good number of years—we went back to 2000; I'm sure even before that—to travel in the new year, to get the most contemporary advice possible on the financial situation from interested parties, be they individuals, groups or municipalities. Then the committee does its best to work together to take that advice back to the finance minister for his or her budget. That has been the pattern for almost a decade, at least on my list, and I'm sure well before that.

Now, for the first time in my memory at least, we will be travelling and completing our work on the road before

the Christmas season. You wonder why we've moved off that pattern. It seems to me that the McGuinty government has become increasingly queasy about the financial news, the role that their tax-and-spend policies have played in precipitating the decline in Ontario, to the point where we're last or second last in all of Canada in job creation. We're losing record numbers of talented individuals. They are trying to find work in other provinces, and not just Alberta but most of the others, and leaving Ontario. No doubt they have great concern about the case that is being made by the official opposition, among other observers, that it was Dalton McGuinty's early decisions to increase taxes to among now the highest in North America on business investments, as well as on middle class families; to increase the cost of energy, to close down without any real plan to replace about 20% of our energy supply; and with each cabinet meeting unrolling more spools and spools of red tape that are throttling the creativity of our entrepreneurs and the private sector.

I know my colleague from Sarnia and my colleague from Parry Sound-Muskoka have brought forward, quite passionately, the concerns that they have heard in their communities, and from the small business sector particularly, with the new WSIB bill standing in the name of Minister Fonseca that is before the assembly. In fact, we had the gallery filled just the other day with hard-working small business people from Muskoka and other parts of the province who wanted to express directly to the government the impact this is going to have, shutting some of them down, sadly, and increasing their costs by \$11,000 or more, depending on the size of their operation.

So I do worry that the motivation here, in moving away from our tradition of listening to the public in the new year and providing advice shortly thereafter for the spring budget, is motivated by the fact that Dalton McGuinty does not want to have any further debate on the state of the economy and his role in Ontario's decline in becoming a have-not province. Quite frankly, I wouldn't be surprised if we see the Ontario Legislature prorogue in the time ahead and come back further into the new year.

As I said earlier, you don't know where the news is going. Every day brings a different headline. If you talk with the auto sector, it seems that every day there are at least three or four different stories in the major media outlets about where that sector is heading. Bank reports are coming out painting an increasingly gloomy picture of Ontario's future. We, in the Progressive Conservative Party, would look forward to providing our best advice on how to get Ontario's economy back to its traditional spot as a leader in Canada. In fact, we always do that: We bring forward at least our dissenting reports filled with our recommendations because, as you know, we don't have the votes on the committee and not as many motions, not as many amendments as we'd like to see to government bills or to the report pass. I will be reading through some of these reports from earlier on to talk

about some of the work that the official opposition has done on the committee.

1510

I do want to give credit to William Short, who is the clerk of the finance and economic affairs committee. He's a very hard-working and dedicated public servant. It's been a pleasure to work with him on the committee. It's not easy, I think; it's almost like herding cats sometimes, trying to hold rein on 10 or more politicians who are on the road, let alone all the staff that come with committee: the translators, Hansard, etc. The clerk's work is very difficult, not only in lining up, as my colleague from Pickering-Scarborough East described, who's coming to the committee, but in making the travel arrangements and making sure the committee runs on time and the folks know when to be there to provide their advice. I do want to give Mr. Short credit.

We have an experienced Chair, Mr. Hoy, the member from Chatham-Kent. Is that riding correct?

Interjection.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Chatham-Kent-Essex.

Mr. Pat Hoy: Leamington now.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Chatham-Kent-Essex, soon to be Leamington, he says. All right. Anyway, we have an experienced Chair there who helps to guide the process.

The problem is that we have been rushing through the finance pre-budget consultations this year. I do worry that the time in which this motion, if it does pass, gets through the assembly will put Mr. Short on a very tight time frame to fill up those committee hearings, and all of the groups who should be given a chance to have their say won't have that opportunity at those hearings.

Just by way of example, if you look at the agenda of our first meeting here in Toronto on Thursday, November 20, while we did hear from some groups—my colleague referenced a couple of them, like Linda Franklin from Colleges Ontario, and you had also mentioned, I think, the road builders in your presentation. There were a number of gaps on the schedule. Historically, we don't have that number of gaps. For example, if you walk through the afternoon, we had People for Education at 2:30, the Canadian Youth Business Foundation at 2:45, a 3 o'clock presentation from Donna Rubin of the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors. They were all very good presentations, but then we had a gap at 3:15. "To be confirmed" was at 3:30. Fortunately, the Association of International Automobile Manufacturers of Canada were there early and we were able to fill in some of that gap. I think the Co-operative Housing Federation of Ontario, who made an important presentation, spoke at their time at 4 o'clock.

Because of these challenges with the schedule—and again, 4:15 was to be confirmed; 4:30, to be confirmed; 4:45, to be confirmed. We had the restaurant, hotel and motel association, and then again, 5:15 was to be confirmed and 5:45 to be confirmed.

As I said, I think Mr. Short has great skill; he's incredibly dedicated, doing his best under the circumstances. But if we look at the first day of committee

hearings as an example, that gives me great pause about the motion that the Liberal government has brought forward and our ability to hear from the kinds of groups that we traditionally hear from or for new groups and individuals that may be coming forward, based on what we've seen to date and based on the incredibly tight time frames that Mr. Short and Chair Hoy are going to have to work under.

Unsurprisingly, this is consistent with what we saw around Bill 114. Bill 114, of course, was a budget bill. It was a bill that was brought in, infamously, on the day when the finance minister rose in this assembly and announced that Ontario was back in deficit financing, that despite a \$28-billion increase in revenues in the provincial treasury, Ontario was going to be running a deficit. Just on that point, if Ontario's government, the McGuinty government, had spent at a level of inflation plus population growth—it's a relatively generous modifier, if you will—they would still have some approximately \$8 billion left in the kitty, if all that revenue had come in. That could have helped to fund reductions in taxes for our beleaguered business sector; that could have helped with some infrastructure investments to provide for a better future for Ontario businesses and families. But instead, that massive increase in revenue was frittered away. I think if you asked the average person in the Rotary Club or down at Sobeys on a Saturday morning doing the shopping if they've seen \$28 billion in increased benefits as a result of this spending, you'd be hard pressed to find many. It would be a very small minority that would agree that that money was put into the right priorities, given the demands today.

Bill 114 was brought in on the infamous day of Ontario's return to budget deficit financing. I guess we could have predicted what would happen with the finance hearings when we looked at the timeline for Bill 114. I think only a small handful of Liberal members rose to speak this bill, even though it was a budget bill, even though it had approximately 20 or 21 different schedules, impacting everything from the aggregates sector to long-term-care homes to senior citizens and even to attendance in question period by cabinet ministers. Only a handful rose to debate it.

I know that a number of members of my caucus who wanted to speak to it did not have the chance, because the bill was time allocated on November 3. Therefore, under the rules, there was the vote the next day. The bill was carried on division. We voted against it, and the NDP voted against it; the Liberals had the votes, so the bill passed. But again, debate was cut short by a time allocation motion, also known as guillotine motion.

Here are the peculiar aspects—"peculiar" is probably too modest a word—the very upsetting aspects of the time allocation motion. Amendments to Bill 114 were due by noon on November 5. So the bill was ordered to committee on November 4, and amendments were due by noon the very next day. The deadline to apply for public hearings was 5 p.m. on November 5, 2008, and then public hearings occurred on November 6. So the bill was

ordered to committee on the 4th, and average Ontario citizens and interested groups were expected to prepare presentations on this mammoth budget bill, covering 20-some different schedules, within 48 hours, on November 6. Then, in a feat that defies physics, it was expected that what the committee members heard on November 6 would help them produce amendments to the bill on November 5.

Let me make that clear, Mr. Speaker. We had committee meetings on November 6. We listened to groups like the Coalition After Property Tax Reform and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, but if we liked something in the presentations we heard, the amendments were due 24 hours earlier, on November 5. Short of borrowing Dwight Duncan's time machine, it's obviously impossible to take what we heard at the committee hearings and move it into amendments to the bill, given the bizarre and dramatically unfair and undemocratic aspects of the time allocation motion on Bill 114.

Then, it was ordered for third reading. It was reported without any kind of amendment. We had brought forward some amendments. We had our own amendments; we scrambled. My colleague from the NDP brought forward several amendments. I know we agreed on some and disagreed on others. I think he supported some of mine and I supported some of his; they seemed sensible.

I don't think it's Mr. Arthurs. He didn't crack the whip. Somebody else over there cracked the whip. Despite the fact that we actually found agreement—our parties have very divergent views on a number of issues. But the fact that NDP and Conservative members supported some very sensible motions that either party had brought forward, but the fact that the Liberals—every one of them—voted them down tells me that it was more likely that they were whipped to vote them down as opposed to listening to the actual case made at committee.

Then, despite the bill covering 68, 70 pages, something like that—Lord knows how many different acts it covered—the government members didn't bring forward a single amendment to the bill either, which defies reason. So Bill 114 was reported to the House on November 17, 2008, and then the time allocation motion, if I recall, allowed for a total of one hour of debate. So we had 20 minutes, the NDP had 20 minutes and the government members had 20 minutes, and then she was done.

Perhaps we in the opposition could have read the intent of the McGuinty government to try to push everything through before Christmas and then go quiet, hoping that the economic clouds pass over, or that they won't get blamed for their tax-and-spend policies that impact the economy. Nonetheless, Bill 114 did not allow for much input from the general public and was rammed through the Legislature, and now we find ourselves in the same situation in the pre-budget consultations, seeing them end in the week before Christmas. As I suggested, I think it's going to be awfully difficult for many people to find the time, given all things happening in the third week of December, to put together the report they probably would

if they had the time and the committee was restored to its regular hearings in late January or early February.

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We'll see where this motion goes. It's the intention of the PC caucus to vote it down. Whatever happens, we'll continue to do our work. If our motions are not adopted, our good Conservative motions to stimulate the economy, if they get voted down by the government members of the committee—we do put together our pre-budget consultation dissenting reports. I hope that the Minister of Finance takes the time to read through them. I've gathered them up because I think they always make for good reading; very good advice. Secondly, it's interesting, too, to see the topics that were highlighted and compare that to the situation we find ourselves in today.

I have in my hand the Pre-Budget Consultation Progressive Conservative (Official Opposition) Dissenting Report of 2004. The committee members at the time: Toby Barrett, Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant; and John O'Toole, Durham. Other members who were part of the committee, who participated in the committee hearings and in the report: Ted Arnott, Waterloo-Wellington; John Baird, Nepean-Carleton; Jim Flaherty, Whitby-Ajax; Tim Hudak—I was then Erie-Lincoln; Frank Klees, Oak Ridges; Norm Miller, Parry Sound-Muskoka; Bob Runciman, Leeds-Grenville; Laurie Scott, Haliburton-Victoria-Brock; Elizabeth Witmer, Kitchener-Waterloo; and John Yakabuski, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

A good number of PCs had taken the time to sit on the committee. We did travel extensively around the province in January and I think February of that year and came up with our report in 2004.

Let me highlight some of the aspects of the executive summary to start with, page 3 of that report, entitled "Competitive Taxes = Strong Economy = More Jobs and Secure Employment = Better Quality of Life for All." The report begins, "It is the position of the official opposition that a competitive taxation system attracts more business investment, which in turn creates a strong economy and creates more high-paying, secure jobs for Ontarians. With revenue generated from the resulting economic growth we can afford better health care, better educational opportunities for our children and more effective social programs.

"In Ontario today"—again, this was 2004—"there is no so-called 'structural deficit'—only a deficit in leadership and courage to make the decisions necessary to govern in a fiscally responsible manner. The Liberal government has done nothing in six months to improve the fiscal situation in Ontario. In fact, they made it worse with the largest tax hike in the history of Ontario."

Just a few months before, the Liberals had talked about the increase that they were going to bring forward, despite campaign commitments to the contrary, that saw a dramatic increase in business taxes, in taxes on middle class families and seniors. We saw at the time driver licence renewal fees going up by some 50%, if I recall. Health care services like chiropractic care and optometry that had been on OHIP for some time were de-listed,

meaning they were basically privatized. Again, that's the framework that this report was written in.

The report goes on to say, "The Premier has broken almost 20 of his key election promises, and because of his government's inaction, Ontario will now run a \$7.8-billion deficit in the fiscal year 2003-04. The official opposition and third party analysts such as the Canadian Taxpayers Federation maintain that this was not necessary and the books could have been balanced if the government had the necessary courage and political will."

This was, I think, a very important observation, considering that this report was written only a number of months after the McGuinty government had been sworn in.

"The Liberal tax hike agenda renders Ontario at a competitive disadvantage. Corporate taxes are higher than competing provinces' and 11% higher than in the United States. Raising taxes cripples our ability to attract and create jobs. It also means a loss in foreign investment and much needed capital for expansion of businesses in Ontario.

"The government should reduce the tax burden on both individuals and their employers in order to make Ontario more competitive. Furthermore, the government should live up to its pledge to not raise taxes or implement any new taxation measures without the explicit consent of Ontario voters through a province-wide referendum."

Let me pause for a second there.

Back in 2004, my colleagues Mr. Barrett and Mr. O'Toole, with support from other members of the PC caucus who sat on the committee, had called attention to the potential damage that the high-tax agenda could cause to the Ontario economy.

If you look at the numbers since 2004, over 200,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs have fled our province. The impact in my area from John Deere closing down is now being felt and will be felt for some time to come. In the Hamilton area, the Stelco and other layoffs and some closures—Ball manufacturing in Burlington impacts on my riding as well—have had significant impacts, not only on the local economy but on Ontario families that have depended on those well-paying jobs and have been struggling to find replacement jobs that match the pay and benefits of those manufacturing sites.

Since that time of the significant tax increases, we've seen other provinces actually go in the opposite direction and reduce their tax burden on businesses in those provinces. Ontario, since that point in time, regularly ranks last or next to last in job creation in the entire country when it comes to the percentage of jobs in the economy. Our growth rates have stalled, and there is much speculation about our heading into recession as a result of the slowdown in the Ontario economy.

If you look at the actual numbers, while government members will regularly rise in the House and boast about all the jobs that have been created under the McGuinty government, on most measures, the majority of those jobs have actually been government jobs, which are not in themselves creating wealth.

Jobs that are in the private sector create the wealth to help us afford to better deliver government services like health care and education. The problem is that you need to do those things in lockstep. When you have a healthy private sector economy creating jobs and investing, and more people working, they pay taxes to support essential public services. But what we have seen from the McGuinty government is a rapid growth in government spending that is well beyond what private sector job creation could sustain, and that's why we've seen the slowest rate of private sector job creation in Canada by the McGuinty government.

So kudos—I wish the news were happier; I wish they had been wrong—kudos to Mr. Barrett and Mr. O'Toole and others who were participating in the committee for having the foresight to call attention to the McGuinty government about the impact that their high taxes could potentially have on the economy. We are now paying a price for that, four and five years later.

While this report was put together, and it was an excellent, well-thought-out report, it does look like then-Finance Minister Sorbara ignored the advice, because he maintained that high level of taxation since, and added on other levels of direct or indirect taxation, such as the new WSIB bill that is before the assembly as I speak.

Here's a second and important piece of advice in the 2004 opposition report that I think supports the call for lowering taxes but stands out on its own as well:

"The government should tie its spending to outcomes. Increased spending in areas of health care and education must benefit patients and students respectively, and not get sucked into the black hole of skyrocketing salaries and governance. Government spending should only take place when Ontarians can obtain real value for every dollar spent. If the government continues down its present path, Ontario will lose its competitive advantage, an advantage it enjoyed for eight consecutive years under the Progressive Conservative government."

I always like to put the government spending in this perspective. It took from Confederation—John Sandfield Macdonald, the first Premier of the province of Ontario—until Ernie Eves to get government spending to \$68 billion. In just over five short years, Dalton McGuinty will put it up to some \$96 billion, on the way to triple figures.

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A \$28-billion increase is dramatic. It is greater than the entire budgets of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and New Brunswick combined. It is greater than Saskatchewan and Manitoba combined. I think we would be hard pressed to say that we have seen value for all those tax dollars that have been invested.

We did see the creation of a massive new bureaucracy of middle management, the LHINs—Local Health Integration Networks—local in name only, by the way. I know decisions for Niagara's health care have been amalgamated into one massive system. Niagara, Hamilton, Haldimand and Brant, I believe, are all part of that LHIN. We're now seeing, as a result of these un-

accountable, unelected and largely anonymous individuals, hand-picked by the Liberal cabinet to sit on these LHINs, the closure of emergency services in Fort Erie and Port Colborne, the loss of the maternity ward in Niagara Falls. I know my constituents in Glanbrook and upper Stoney Creek, who will mostly utilize Hamilton health services, are very concerned about the elimination of services to adults at the McMaster emergency room. In fact, we saw one member of the LHIN actually resign in protest, commenting on the undemocratic nature of the decisions from the LHINs.

I forget off the top of my head, but some hundreds of millions of dollars have been taken out of front-line health care services to set up these new bureaucracies. Sure, they have a beautiful new office in Grimsby with new furniture, a new building being constructed that is going to house all of the staff working for the LHINs, but I bet if you surveyed folks at Coffee Culture in Grimsby this afternoon, you wouldn't find a single one who would rather see the money going in to that new LHIN building at Bartlett and Highway 8. They would want every one of those dollars going in to the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital or McNally House hospices by way of example.

The concerns that Mr. Barrett and Mr. Arnott, among others, brought up in 2004—I know our then finance critic, John Baird, had a significant role. He's gone on to bigger and better things in the federal government and we congratulate him on his new position at transport and infrastructure. But I do want to commend my colleagues for the foresight, in that 2004 report, in at least warning the McGuinty government, specifically finance minister Sorbara, that their runaway spending and taxation policies would put significant shackles on the Ontario economy and make it increasingly difficult for us to compete if markets internationally turned downwards. I think that their advice, unfortunately, seems to be coming through. I wish Liberals had listened to him at the time and we could have staved off many of the job losses we're seeing in Ontario.

Let me point you to 2005's pre-budget consultations, again standing in the name of Mr. Barrett and Mr. O'Toole. Official opposition members who participated: Jim Flaherty, Whitby-Ajax; Cam Jackson, Burlington; Norm Miller, Parry Sound-Muskoka; Bob Runciman, Leeds-Grenville; Jerry Ouellette, Oshawa.

The reports, by the way, are many pages long. They're usually about 20 or so pages. I do believe they get to the point rather quickly; there's certainly not a lot of extraneous language. I think the fact that they're that length shows that a lot of thought was put into them and a lot of important statistics to back up the case. But I'll confine, in the interests of time, my remarks to the executive summaries. In 2005, "The Liberal government entitled their 2004 budget The Plan for Change, but in fact, this document marked the point at which the Liberals officially changed their plan. Instead of providing fair tax policy, a balanced budget and keeping their promises, the Liberal government slapped hard-working Ontarians with a \$2.6-billion regressive health tax,

committed to adding \$10 billion to the provincial debt and threw away any plans for a sustainable economic future for our province.

"Unfortunately, the outlook for the upcoming 2005 Ontario budget is no better for the people of Ontario."

They reinforce some of the points that they made in their 2004 report by saying, "The Liberal government has done nothing to control spending across government, and a record \$7 billion in increased taxes over the past year has resulted in stagnating economic growth and thousands of lost jobs. Recent reports show that employment has plummeted by 212,000 since the implementation of the regressive health tax in July 2004, and economic experts indicate that the government's current agenda will in fact see over \$38 billion added to the provincial debt by 2010."

That's pretty close. We are now at 2008, heading into 2009, and the provincial debt has gone up by close to that figure. I think their prediction of 2005 will ring true, that we'll see an additional \$38 billion added to the provincial debt under the McGuinty government by 2010.

"In addition, our most cherished public services are facing an epic crisis at the hands of this government. Teachers are voting in favour of strike action across the province, 8,500 front-line health care workers will lose their jobs in the coming year, our agricultural sector is teetering on the verge of bankruptcy and Ontario doctors are resorting to unprecedented labour action....

"The official opposition is calling upon the government to take immediate action to ensure that the viability of our economic future is restored, and that vital services that all Ontarians rely upon are preserved for generations to come."

Here's the shorthand for what the official opposition recommended at that time: "The Liberal government must respect the financial circumstances of low- and middle-income Ontarians and must cease their regressive taxation measures, including the Ontario health premium....

"The Liberal government must ensure that vital front-line health services in our hospitals are not compromised by their inability to negotiate with hospitals and stop the layoff of 8,500 nurses and staff." I do hope that we will hear from the Ontario Hospital Association in the upcoming consultations to see how high that number may be under the current circumstances.

"Starting today, the Liberal government," the report says, "must put aside its reckless agenda and start working to regaining trust, fairness and develop a strong economic plan for the province of Ontario."

An interesting chart I'd refer members to, on page 4 of the report, shows the drop in employment that took place not too long after the Liberals announced their massive tax increases on seniors, working families and businesses.

In 2006, entitled *Liberal Ontario: Here They Go Again—High Spending, High Taxing McGuinty Liberals Continue to Mismanage the Economy*, the 2006 report, standing in the names of Barrett, O'Toole, Hudak, Yaka-

buski, Miller again, Runciman, Munro, Witmer, Arnott and Tory:

"Paying More, Getting Less

"Consistent with the dissenting reports of the official opposition in 2004 and 2005, over the past year the McGuinty Liberals have forged ahead with their reckless fiscal agenda and driven the Ontario economy backwards."

Between then and 2008-09, this report suggests that, "The McGuinty Liberals will add \$75 to the provincial debt each and every second—that totals almost \$14 billion. That is more than \$1,000 of new debt for every man, woman and child living in Ontario and represents a significant mortgage on our future prosperity.

"This increase in the provincial debt is shocking considering the spike in tax revenue that has been generated by the record-breaking McGuinty Liberal tax hikes. In 2008-09, the McGuinty Liberals forecast that the government will spend over \$90 billion—that is almost \$20 billion more than when they took office."

Ironically, they passed that like nothing. They blew that in the dust. They're well over \$90 billion by 2008-09. The Liberals were spending at a rate that would make Bob Rae blush, and they even surpassed that.

"However, it should be noted that as far back as the 2004 dissenting report, the official opposition has been on record warning the McGuinty Liberals of the long-term impact their reckless fiscal policies would have on the provincial economy and the standard of living for Ontarians."

Page 3: "Perhaps the most telling of the numbers above"—some economic measures that the report refers to—"is the decline in manufacturing jobs under the watch of the McGuinty Liberals. Manufacturing is at the heart of Ontario's economy." Those of us from Hamilton and Niagara know that all too well. "Manufacturers create spin-off jobs with suppliers that provide services to manufacturers and to their workers. Manufacturing jobs tend to pay more and have more generous benefits and pensions than jobs in other sectors."

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Sadly, the prediction from the 2004 report turned out to be true and accurate. This report notes that in Ontario in 2006 the manufacturing sector employed 80,000 fewer people compared to just one year earlier.

Here's something to worry about too. The 2006 report notes in the the section on Liberal mismanagement of the economy that, "The McGuinty Liberals' consistent mismanagement of the province's finances is setting up the next government to inherit an unsustainable mess.... Their plan is focused on generating abnormally high revenue by punishing hard-working Ontarians and their employers with high taxes and spending public funds at record rates.

"Since the McGuinty Liberals took office, program spending has increased at a rate of 8% per year. That equates to a \$10-billion jump in spending over the past two years and puts ... Liberals on pace to increase spending by \$20 billion or 27% over their four years in office." And despite that prediction, despite that view that Liberal

spending would come to a level of \$20 billion, they actually exceeded that and are now on pace for more than \$28 billion in spending.

The report talks about some fiscal challenges—tax increases, corporate income taxes, property taxes among many others—and makes the recommendation that in order to stave off future job losses, in order to help the remaining manufacturing jobs stay in the province of Ontario and encourage our talented young men and women who are coming up through our school system to stay in Ontario to raise their families and build their own futures, they take heed of that advice. But as we know, the finance minister and the Premier did not take that advice of the committee. As a result, as you'll see in 2007, the situation becomes worse.

Pre-Budget Consultation, Progressive Conservative (Official Opposition) Dissenting Report, Liberal Fiscal Mismanagement: The Final Chapter—McGuinty Liberals Asleep at the Switch as Ontario's Economy Sputters. It stands in the names of Arnott, Barrett, Hudak, O'Toole, MacLeod, Yakabuski, Norm Miller, Tascona and Murdoch.

Just a summary of the introduction: "During the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs hearings, the committee was made aware of the very disconcerting news that Ontario was dead last in economic growth among Canadian provinces in 2006—trailing the next-slowest-growing province by a substantial 0.7%—and is forecast to only marginally improve to ninth place this year. Furthermore, Ontario is at risk of losing an additional 50,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs in 2007....

"Unfortunately, the finance minister is either oblivious to the challenges or seems to believe that the cure for the problem is another heavy dose of what caused the illness in the first place: higher taxes, higher-priced and less reliable energy supply and government spending increases far in excess of the growth rate of the economy. Ontario residents are responding in record numbers to the harmful policies of the McGuinty government. Ontario has seen a net loss of 30,000 residents over the previous year, spiking in the third quarter of 2006 with a loss of almost 59,000 at annual rates.

"Based on the advice heard at committee and our own research, the official opposition submitted motions that, if endorsed by the Minister of Finance, would help reverse the decline in manufacturing jobs and spur investment in the province of Ontario."

Page 4: "Since the 2004 dissenting report, the official opposition has been on the record warning the McGuinty Liberals of the long-term impact their reckless fiscal policies would have on the provincial economy and the standard of living of Ontarians."

Here's what they said in 2004, highlighted in the 2007 report: "The fiscal agenda of this government is one that will eliminate Ontario's competitive advantage, and one that will drive business investment and jobs into neighbouring jurisdictions that offer lower tax rates and a more attractive business environment.

"The tax system being created by the Liberal government will create a significant barrier to investments, and erode our ability to improve productivity and adopt new technologies. Rather than adopting policies that create a competitive advantage, the Liberal government is pursuing tax policies that create disincentives for investment....

"Our standard of living will be significantly compromised in this decade if the Liberals continue to press forward with their reckless tax hike agenda. Ontario cannot afford to veer from a course of tax reductions in the ... future. Instead, the position of the official opposition is that the upcoming budget should introduce new tax reduction measures that improve our productivity, competitiveness and incomes measurably."

Again, in 2007, the committee members noted the warning from the 2004 dissenting report about the long-term impacts of the reckless fiscal policies and outdated tax-and-spend initiatives of the McGuinty government. Now, as we stand at the end of 2008, the long term is here. We all know about the layoffs happening across the province; we all know about the increased cost of living to Ontario families and Ontario seniors; and we all were devastated by the news that the province of Ontario, the engine of growth in all of Confederation, had become a have-not province and, for the first time in history, will be receiving equalization payments. Basically, Dalton McGuinty's policies have put Ontario on the welfare rolls of Confederation.

I would have expected that when Dalton McGuinty came back from his two-week trip abroad, he would have stood up said, "Come hell or high water will I allow Ontario to remain a have-not province for one year more. I will call together my finance minister, economic development minister and others concerned to come up with a plan to grow Ontario out of its have-not status." Instead, all we see from Dalton McGuinty is a character from Oliver putting his hand out, "Please, sir, may I have more?" asking for more handouts. There seems to be no chagrin, no regret that Ontario is a have-not province, and no plan, despite repeated calls from the official opposition, has been forthcoming to grow Ontario, help us create jobs and make us once again the most attractive environment and province for starting a new business or expanding an existing one.

Then the most recent, 2008: Once the Economic Engine of Canada, Now the Caboose. The Progressive Conservative official opposition dissenting report asks the question, are Dalton McGuinty's harmful economic policies driving Ontario to have-not status? Arnott, Barrett, Hudak, Yakabuski, Murdoch, Bailey and Munro contributed to this report back in February 2008. Are Dalton McGuinty's harmful economic policies driving Ontario to have-not status? When we asked the Premier, the finance minister or any of their colleagues, "Is that going to happen," they'd say, "No." They'd say, "Oh pshaw, you're exaggerating. You're blowing it out of proportion. There's no way Ontario would be a have-not province."

We took it seriously. We took seriously the advice we heard in January and February of that year and throughout the year before. We said that if policies did not change, if we did not bring forward an economic policy that helped give relief to middle-class families and seniors, that didn't help our struggling business sector, Ontario was on the verge of becoming a have-not province. Then this October, like a bombshell landing on our province, Ontario, filled with great entrepreneurs and hard-working, talented individuals, was on the welfare rolls of Confederation because of Dalton McGuinty's tax-and-spend policies. I do wish they would have listened to our 2008 report.

I express, with great regret, the motion before the assembly today, and I do want to move an amendment to the motion.

I move that the government motion be amended by striking out "during the week of December 15, 2008," and replacing it with the following: "during the months of January and/or February 2009 when the Legislature is not sitting, rather than rushing the pre-budget hearings under the cover of Christmas, and in the following 19 vulnerable communities, among the hardest hit by Ontario's economic downturn: Brampton, Brantford, Cambridge, Chatham, Cornwall, Guelph, Hamilton, Ingersoll, Kitchener-Waterloo, Lindsay, London, Oakville, Oshawa, Owen Sound, Smiths Falls, St. Catharines, St. Thomas, Welland and Windsor."

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Could I get a copy of the amendment, please?

Mr. Hudak has moved that the government motion be amended by striking out "during the week of December 15, 2008," and replacing it with the following: "during the months of January and/or February 2009 when the Legislature is not sitting—rather than rushing the pre-budget hearings through under the cover of Christmas—and in the following 19 vulnerable communities among the hardest hit by Ontario's economic downturn: Brampton, Brantford, Cambridge, Chatham, Cornwall, Guelph, Hamilton, Ingersoll, Kitchener-Waterloo, Lindsay, London, Oakville, Oshawa, Owen Sound, Smiths Falls, St. Catharines, St. Thomas, Welland and Windsor."

Further debate?

1550

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise to speak both to this motion and to the amendment made by my friend from Niagara West—Glanbrook. I want to assure the House that I am fully aware that I have one hour in which to debate this motion and the amendment thereto, but I do not expect to spend my hour, with the greatest of respects to my colleagues who have spoken at great length about the minutiae here of the committee process and about the history of this committee as it has travelled around the province.

I think the issue is a relatively simple one. The issue is, does the committee, which has been so structured and which has voted by majority to conduct its hearings in the five cities that were mentioned, the cities of Niagara

Falls, Windsor, Thunder Bay, Sudbury and Ottawa, have the authority and the right to do so?

The only reason that we are before this House is that there was not unanimous consent amongst the House leaders. That's the reason that we are here. I will state for the record that it is my intention, when this comes for a vote before this House, to vote for the subcommittee recommendation that was made to the committee. I said so in subcommittee; I said so in committee. I have to state that I take some considerable umbrage this morning at the comments made during question period—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Umbrage? You're upset. Tell them you're upset.

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes, I take considerable umbrage at the comments made by the Minister of Finance, who accused both the opposition party and the third party of not supporting this particular motion. As my friend the parliamentary assistant surely can advise the minister, that is not and was never the case. I want that to be very clear for the record, because it seems to me, and I will explain in the body of my argument, that holding the rotation and going to these five cities—I believe the cities themselves were chosen unanimously by the subcommittee—was in order to accommodate the legislative process.

Having said that, the subcommittee and the committee approved the times and the dates and the places. They first of all chose that there would be three days of consultation in Toronto. At least one of the days and possibly two of them would involve expert witnesses.

They chose the locations, I think, quite carefully, Toronto being sort of central and where the Legislature sits—easy access for three days. They also chose to go to each of the regions of this great province: the Niagara region, southwestern Ontario, northwestern Ontario, northeastern Ontario and eastern Ontario. They were chosen, one in each place, as I think was appropriate and correct.

They chose the date, and the date was chosen, I think, with great concern, not because we are trying to hide under cover of Christmas—certainly, that is not my intention as an opposition member, to hide under cover of Christmas—but in order to accommodate what needs to happen in this House.

Quite frankly, we are facing the greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression, and some are of the opinion that it may even rival that of the Great Depression. We need to get on with this and assure the public that what we are doing in this Legislature meets the requirements of the people of Ontario.

We had to debate the method of travel. It seemed quite logical to hold three here in Toronto; to go by bus to Niagara Falls, because, contrary to what some politicians have done in the past, taking planes to Hamilton and Niagara Falls, I am of the firm view that taking the bus there is the appropriate method of travel. The rest will be accommodated by plane, because it's a large province, to go to Windsor, on to Thunder Bay, on to Sudbury, and finally Ottawa and back to Toronto. We also chose quite

carefully the methodology by which people would be heard.

This was referred to the House leaders, and I understand the arguments being made by my friend from Niagara West—Glanbrook. I also understand perhaps some of the feelings of my colleagues in the official opposition. There is a great deal of angst on this side of the House, as there is a great deal of angst throughout Ontario, about where this government is heading, what is happening in the budget downturn and what is happening in the economic downturn, not only in this province but around the world. People want to debate it and they want to be current on it. But I think we have a larger obligation. We have a larger obligation to the citizens of this province to discover what they have to say, to do it in a timely manner and report back in time for the budget announcements that will be made by the Minister of Finance.

Quite frankly, I am not afraid of a lack of participation by people coming before the committee. If anything, it was very clear: Other than a few minor glitches, we had 80 people lined up and ready to proceed on the budget, to be heard in Toronto. We could only hear 51. We had to go to our respective caucuses and each had to choose 17 people we wanted to hear. Part of the problem was that perhaps we all didn't choose the right 17, because some of the ones we chose determined that they couldn't come. There was really not time, I guess, for the first day for us to make the determination whether we could call someone else in or someone could come. But I don't believe that's going to happen on days 2 and 3, those days being December 4 and 11. That is not going to be a problem. We will accommodate the overwhelming majority of people who have applied here.

I am convinced that we will have full or nearly full representation in each of the other five cities. There will be people leaving from Toronto to go there. There will be people in those towns that are hard hit in the Niagara region; people who are hard hit in Windsor and the areas surrounding in southwestern Ontario; people who are hard hit in northwestern Ontario, particularly the forest industry, who will want to talk to us; people who are starting to suffer even in a boom town like Sudbury; and in the northeast, with the mining, because the prices of commodities have fallen recently, people who will want to be heard; and people in eastern Ontario, through Ottawa, who will want to be heard as well.

I also have to stop and think about exactly what our committee does. This is a unique experience for our committee, and perhaps most committees, because we're not dealing with a bill. Every other committee upon which I sit has a bill, and we are talking about the bill and asking for amendments to the bill. This is not what we're doing here. What we are doing here is a service to the people of Ontario, in my view, by going out and asking them what they would like to see contained within the body of the budget.

I've been on this now for a number of years; I think this will be my fifth or sixth year travelling the province

as the finance critic for the New Democratic Party. It's pretty much the same and it happens all the time. We have people who come in from groups that are looking for additional funding. We have people who are coming in and looking for spheres of the economy that they think need a push. We have people occasionally who come in and tell us to hold the line on taxes because they don't want anything else. We have people who come in to talk about local issues, local problems, in hope that the government will listen. We have people who come in arguing and looking for legislative changes that will help them, even though it may not be within the mandate of the finance committee. But we are there to listen, and we are there in the end when we sit down and do our motions to try to convey to the ministry and to the Minister of Finance what should be contained within the budget. We are not there to make amendments; we are there to make suggestions. We are there to listen and then to use our collective wisdom upon the basis of what we've heard to make recommendations that we hope the Minister of Finance will include within the budget.

I do have to admit that from time to time, I have been disappointed on that committee. I have to admit that from time to time, when we hear repeated and good suggestions being made by groups—and I think particularly of some of the groups that come before us with issues of autism and with the developmentally delayed and others—where they are seeking funding and kinds of government services which have not been given out in the past, I have been disappointed. But they still have the opportunity to speak and they still have some champions in the finance committee who try to go forward and do something for them.

1600

I think that's what is important here. Is it going to be any better if we delay it? I would hesitate to say that it could possibly be better. Are the economic conditions going to change between now and January? Undoubtedly. They changed today from yesterday, and they'll change again tomorrow. I am constantly shocked, as a reader of the financial pages of the local newspapers, to see the swings that are happening, not only in the Dow Jones but in the Toronto Stock Exchange, not only here on this continent but around the world each and every day—the price of commodities that rise and fall.

Who would have thought a mere month ago that oil would be trading for \$49 a barrel? Who would have ever thought that? Who would have thought that the Canadian dollar would drop 20 cents in a matter of a couple of months? Nobody could have, with any great certainty, known that.

But having said that, I am convinced that the people of Ontario need to be heard and that we as a committee need to have the opportunity to present what we learn in a rational, coherent and cogent way to the Minister of Finance.

I take this all upon his word, notwithstanding the umbrage that I earlier expressed at how he got the fact wrong about what I was trying to do in the committee. I

do take him at his word that he intends to bring forward a budget this year earlier than most years; that he intends to bring it forward in the month of March prior to the end of the fiscal year. In my mind, this is good, sound fiscal planning. I have to put myself in those shoes. If I was the Minister of Finance, would I be wanting to present a budget before the end of the fiscal year? The answer quite clearly would be that I would want to.

I know Mr. Hudak, who's watching me intently here, would also be of the same mind, were he to sit over there, because it's important that the ministry bring forward a budget. It's important that we know the direction of government spending, because this is going to be a year unlike other years. It's not going to be all right to try to catch up two or three months into the process where you are forced to make drastic cuts that could have been much smaller or drastic increases that could have been much smaller had they been put in within the full 12-month period.

I think that this is a smart thing to be doing, and I don't know what he's going to do, so I don't want to commend him for the final result, but I do want to commend him for the process of starting it and making sure it is in place for the start of a new fiscal year on April 1.

The second point that seems to be lost here, and I think needs to be made, was the suggestion that the interest will be higher closer to the budget. I don't know whether that is necessarily true. People know what is happening. Every day, there are calls to my office, and I'm sure to all of your offices, everybody on both sides of this House. People are worried about the government direction around a whole range of issues, whether it be education and education funding, whether it be hospitals, whether it be the plight of the poor, and when the government is finally going to come down with its much-vaunted announcement some time in December.

That one puzzles me, as to why there is no speed on that at all. I am very afraid that that announcement is going to be made after the House stops sitting, because I think that's the government's plan. But I will leave that, because I ask the questions, as you know, almost daily, and certainly a couple of times a week, wanting to know when that plan is going to unfurl and unfold itself and when we're going to hear it, and I would hesitate to be a pessimist at any time, but I have a funny feeling it will come after December 11. I don't know why I think that, but I think it will come after, when this House is not in session, because there is a method to that.

But I am not convinced that there is the same method here. There is the reality of the urgency of an earlier budget, which I've already talked about. There is also the opportunity, though, for members of all sides of this Legislature to listen and to carefully consider what has been said, to take the opportunity between December 19 and that time in January when the committee will come back to hear the motions and go through the motions one by one. It is not only an opportunity for us to listen to what the hundred or so presentations that we're going to hear have told us, but also an opportunity for of us to

read the newspapers, to look at statistical and other reports, to look at written documentation which will flow and to come up with good motions. With the House not being in session there will be an opportunity for all parties and all research staff to do that.

I just want to almost finish, I think, talking about how passionately people in this House have spoken in the past about the need for all of us to work together. I remember only two weeks ago, standing here making a passionate speech in support of the Conservatives, who wanted to have an all-party tripartite committee with equal numbers of members who could discuss this issue. I remember thinking that this was a really good idea, that we could work together because this is a time unlike any other time. It is a time of huge economic turmoil. It is a time when people are worried about their pensions. It is a time when people are worried about their jobs and the economy and what is going to happen to them and their children, what is going to happen to their house, what is going to happen to their life savings, what is going to happen to the decimated towns and cities across this entire province. They are looking to us for direction. I supported the Conservatives in their opposition day motion and I was saddened when it went down to defeat because I thought we could all work together.

I am equally saddened, and I listened to my colleague from Niagara West—Glanbrook when he talked about what happens in the committee process, or what has happened, where we try to make sane and sensible motions and they all seem to be shot down. I remember he talked about the budget bill, where the town of—was it Caledon?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Clarington.

Mr. Michael Prue: Clarington; thank you. The town of Clarington came forward and they were in a huge dilemma because they were facing a court case that had been many years in the making, and all of a sudden, there was a change to the budget act which was going to impact that court case and literally had the possibility of taking millions upon millions of dollars out of the local economy. There was no opportunity for a motion to be put forward. I asked, and I thought it was a reasonable thing to ask during that committee, that the government put forward the motion, and if they couldn't do it because of the order of the House, that it be brought back before the committee of the whole House. That's an unusual procedure, but it was at least possible to do it, and I asked that it be done in order that the concerns of the people of Clarington could be heard in this House so that we could do the right thing. I promised on behalf of my party, as the finance critic, that we would not, in any way, try to encumber this House or hold up the House, because that is a possibility when you resolve yourself into a committee of the whole House.

All of that was rebuffed. This is the difficulty I have, so I'm asking you again. I stood up in favour of their motion. I'm now standing up in favour of the government motion. I'm trying to be a voice of sanity in this sometimes not-so-sane place by saying that we need to work together. This is an opportunity to do it. I am going

to support this motion. I'm going to support it because we need to get on with this job; we need to get on with this job now. We need to look after all of those people who have lost—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: No—all of those people who have lost their jobs, all of those people who are worried about where the economy is going, all of those people who are worried about their pensions, all of those people who need the government to do something.

I have listened to the opposition's amendment, and I appreciate the 19 locations they want to go to. I don't know whether it would be physically possible for this committee to visit all of those 19 locations and present a report if we had to start in January or February, and to have that kind of stuff in front of the minister in time for the budget. I, therefore, reluctantly cannot agree to that. If it was simply another date, I might listen to the date, but it seems to me that the longer we prolong that date, the longer we take, as a Legislature, to come to the inevitable conclusions that the finance committee must do and to present those conclusions to the minister.

1610

I don't know what is going to happen, but I do want to say to this House that we all need to work together, and the best way to work together in this circumstance is to go along with the recommendations of the subcommittee of which I was a part. My friend from Niagara West—Glanbrook, my friend from Pickering—Scarborough East, Chair Hoy, and all the others who were on there were all part of that together—and that was the best and most sensible thing to do. I'm asking this House to follow with what the committee wanted to do and let the finance committee get on with its work.

In conclusion, I also want to say that I would hope this government knows that we don't need to spend four days debating this. The people out there expect us to spend our four days on really important things. There are other bills, there are finances that have to be looked at. I'm only taking 20 minutes of my time and then I'm going to sit down, and I don't even know whether any of my colleagues in the NDP are even going to speak to this, because we think there are more important issues than the minutiae of this committee. Let's get on with our work. Now having had three speakers from three parties, in my view that's probably enough on this particular issue.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's always fun to follow the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook, a very hard-working member. We disagree on a few things: mostly everything that the other says and believes.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I disagree with that.

Mr. Bob Delaney: He disagrees with my assumption. But as we get closer and closer to Christmas, I'm sure we will take it all in stride.

What are we talking about here today? Well, every year the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs conducts pre-budget consultations. Normally,

these have taken place after the new year, in or about late January. But this year, in the current economic climate, the message that we've heard loud and clear is that Ontarians would like to speak to their government. Ontarians want to have a chance for their government to talk to them about the economy. People look at their pension plans and think, "Oh, my gosh, look at what a beating I've just taken." People read about banks failing and think, "Can it happen here?" They'll call me in my office and say, "No Canadian banks have failed yet," and I'll say, "Well, no, they haven't," and they'll say, "I keep reading about this stuff in the States. Is that going to happen here?" These are some of the things that prompt Ontarians to want to talk to us. That's why the Minister of Finance proposes conducting the pre-budget consultations now rather than after the new year, as in years previous.

The member for Niagara West—Glanbrook pointed out that he thought that these budget hearings should be conducted earlier in the new year. When their party was in government—eight very long, long years for Ontario—their budget was presented well into the fiscal year. I think this is an important point that needs to be brought out. What is one of the other reasons that the government is holding these consultations now? Holding the pre-budget hearings well into the new year means that you can't present the budget until later and later in the year. What's really important now is that people get a sense of where we are as a province and get that sense in a budget presented earlier, not later. To compare this way with the bad old way, most funding partners who depended on provincial funding were often nearly halfway through their fiscal year before they knew what they would get, and in today's current fiscal climate you need to know that earlier. What this also meant was that those partners that depended on transfer funding—this is in no particular order, and I don't pretend it's complete—entities such as hospitals, cities, school boards, police forces, community care access centres, universities, often had to do their budgeting and negotiate their collective agreements by feeling their way out in the dark, because the budget wasn't going to be presented until well into the spring.

Bear in mind, the fiscal year starts on April 1. We think it's incumbent in this financial climate to present that budget earlier and not later. That's why budgets are read earlier now, since the government was elected, and it has made a real difference to those transfer partners: those hospitals, our cities, our school boards, our police forces, our community care access centres, our universities and so on. They need to know earlier what their numbers are. They need to know there's going to be a change. They need to know how much more they're going to get, or if they're not going to get anything more. I think it puts an air of certainty onto it by giving them their budget numbers earlier. That means we've got to do the pre-budget consultations earlier, and I'm sure even my good friend from Niagara West—Glanbrook can't quarrel with the logic in that.

I'd like to speak to some of the importance of doing it this way to my home city of Mississauga. Since 2003, our government's approach to budgeting, to delivery of the budget and to what to do with the outcome of the budget—I'm just going to speak about my home area of northwest Mississauga—has put seven new schools in our area that we didn't have before. It has meant that Credit Valley's phase 2 was there.

Our opponents opposite say, "We want to cut the health care budget by \$3 billion by eliminating the health care premium." In the absence of that health care premium, facing the growth pressures we have in western Mississauga, we couldn't have Credit Valley Hospital's phase 2 expansion. Trillium couldn't have its expansion, which is nearly complete. These are things an area like Mississauga, which grows each and every year by 20,000 people, virtually all of them within a 10-minute drive of Credit Valley Hospital—that's how many more people our health care system has to serve. We need the fiscal capacity to be able to serve them. Credit Valley needs the certainty of having its budget read, so that it can do some intelligent planning for the next year.

What about that hospital expansion? What would we miss if we followed their advice and weren't able to build it? That's 275,000 square feet of new hospital health care space that western Mississauga couldn't have under a Tory regime. That's 140-plus new beds we have now, but if we followed their advice, we wouldn't. That's an expanded maternity suite. Our maternity suite was built to handle, I think, 2,600 births when the hospital opened in the mid-1980s. Last year, that hospital handled 5,500 births.

The expansion of the maternity suite isn't so much a question of need, anymore, as it is a question of safety. Done their way, we couldn't have it. Done this way, moms who are getting ready to deliver won't have to worry about calling Credit Valley and saying, "I'm getting ready," and have Credit Valley say, "I'm sorry, we can't handle you. We'll have to send you to another hospital, even though your doctor is here," knowing full well that on the date that expectant mom is getting ready to deliver her new baby, that hospital may be booked to capacity.

Our fastest-growing demographic in western Mississauga is seniors. We need those complex-continuing-care beds. Done their way, we couldn't have them. Done our way, those complex-care beds are going to be available to our community when phase 2 is complete in 2011. We desperately need that project. Now we're going to have it.

We needed the rehabilitation of existing space. While we were on constituency week, a week or so back, I had a chance to go in and do my periodic visit to the surgery ward. I went in at 7 o'clock in the morning and met my friends the surgeons. I changed where they change. To give you an idea of how pressed we are for space in our hospital, if your children who play hockey were asked to change for a game in a space like our surgeons change in to get ready to operate, you as parents would be up in arms. At least this year we finally got the surgeons a

washroom in their change room, in their locker room, where they can wash their hands. To quote a line from Bugs Bunny, "I don't want to say this room is too tight, but you've got to go outside to change your mind."

Mr. Tim Hudak: It was Groucho Marx, wasn't it?

Mr. Bob Delaney: It was, in fact, Bugs Bunny.

I spent the morning in surgery. I watched them perform everything from a major hip replacement to a complete rebuild of a jaw, something a very specialized surgeon was doing for a patient who had been flown in from Thunder Bay. Our hospital has got exactly the surgeon that that patient needed. However, who is paying for that operation? We don't begrudge the patient the operation, but that's coming off our budget at Credit Valley. That's one of the reasons that we have such financial pressures in a growth area like Mississauga. That's part of the reason that we need this budget read early.

1620

Now, I don't really blame the members opposite. I mean, they just don't get it. What kind of thinking is this? This is the neo-con, Republican, Conservative way of thinking. Where are they getting their marching orders from? Is it coming off the fax machine at the Langevin Block in Ottawa? Is it coming from Republican National Committee headquarters in Washington? You just wonder, "What is going on with them?"

Now, looking at the logic, let's just revisit history, something that they like to reinvent. Brian Mulroney ran up \$300 billion in public debt. Conservatives say that they don't want to be seen as a tax-and-spend government. That's true. They're not a tax-and-spend government; they're a borrow-and-spend government. "Borrow and spend" doesn't mean that you're paying your bills as you go. "Tax and spend" means if you raise the money and spend the money, you don't leave any debt for future generations. Borrow-and-spend conservatism means that you're leaving the bills to be paid by your children and your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren and their great-great-grandchildren.

Let's look at one of their heroes, Ronald Reagan. God bless Ronald Reagan; he won the cold war. Economically, Ronald Reagan was a disaster. Ronald Reagan left the US taxpayer with \$4 trillion in long-term debt—\$4 trillion. Mike Harris cut taxes and couldn't run a balanced budget even in the huge boom of the 1990s. Well, not without dumping a highway like 407 as an asset at a fraction of its fair market value. That 407 sale is universally considered to be the yardstick for perhaps the most one-sided dumb example of ideology-based neo-con privatization in all of history.

Our government inherited a \$5.6-billion deficit in fiscal 2003-04—\$5.6 billion. Just think of what would have happened if the Ontario public in its infinite wisdom—because after all, the voters are always right. What would have happened if this party opposite had been elected in 2003? What else would they have left us with? Well, they had a—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member for Simcoe North, I'd ask you to withdraw.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Withdrawn. But, Madam Speaker, on a point of order: Would you mind letting him tell the truth?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): That's not a point of order, and I would ask you to please respect the member's right to make his comments. We're in a debate, and everyone has a right to make their comments. So please respect the Speaker's wish to have order in the House. Thank you.

Mr. Bob Delaney: So, let's go back where we were. Let's start with that \$5.6 billion. That was the one that the Toronto Star came out with: this big banner headline that said, "\$5.6 billion." Right underneath—I still have a copy of this paper—it said, "Outgoing Tories Out-right"—well, it's a word you can't use in here.

In addition to that \$5.6 billion, they had proposed, and our government cut, a corporate tax cut—let's do the math here—of \$4.3 billion. They had a private school tax credit of about, oh, half a billion dollars and a grab bag of about another billion dollars in various other giveaways. What did that leave you with by the time you've added it all up? What did the Ontario taxpayer just narrowly miss? They missed a Tory budget deficit of \$11.4 billion.

We started \$5.6 billion in the hole, and three years later, we had managed the economy to a sustainable surplus—a sustainable surplus. If we had followed the Tory rule, where would we be today? How would we be coping with this particular economic slide if the Conservatives had still stayed in power? I shudder to think. Ontario pretty much know, and that's why in 2003 and 2007 Ontario was consistent. Ontario said the most sensible, the most logical, the most workable plan is the one that this government has implemented since 2003 under two truly outstanding finance ministers: my colleague Greg Sorbara, the member from Vaughan, and my colleague Dwight Duncan, the member from—what is he now? Windsor—St. Clair.

Now, our federal government inherited from its predecessors how big a surplus? I think it was, oh, \$15 billion, and now it's going into a deficit.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It takes a lot of doing.

Mr. Bob Delaney: As my colleague from Oakville says, it really does take a lot of doing. How do you run a \$15-billion surplus into a deficit? Well, you give away all the money that you need—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Would the member please get back to the motion that's on the floor? We're debating a particular motion, and I haven't heard many remarks on that motion. Thank you.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Well, thank you, Speaker. You cut the opposition a little bit of slack, so I thought I could discuss some of their points. But let's go back to that, Speaker, back to the motion.

Every year, the committee tables a report with a summary of what the committee heard. It tables its recommendations to the Minister of Finance for his budget. Now, just four weeks ago, I was present in the House. So

were all the members opposite. Four weeks ago, the Progressive Conservative Party spent two hours of debate asking for a select committee on the economy. Of course, we already have a committee that deals with the economy. It's called the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. Let's just quote from its mandate as per standing order 107(e):

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs "is empowered to consider and report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the fiscal and economic policies of the province and to which all related documents shall be deemed to have been referred immediately when the said documents are tabled."

The reason we need this particular motion is what? Let's say we agree with the thrust of it, that we really feel that Ontarians should be talking to their government. Then surely the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs is the medium. This is the one committee that the province has set up that considers these matters each and every year.

We said, "Okay, let's get the committee travelling early." The PC Party initially wanted the committee to meet early but is now playing partisan politics because they don't want it to meet before the new year. I don't quite exactly follow that.

So what are we trying to do here? We're trying to validate Ontario's five-point plan. Let's just quickly recap, because you say "the five-point plan" and people say, "Well, what is the five-point plan?"

Number one, cut business taxes. Number two, invest in infrastructure. Number three, support innovation. Number four, partner with businesses.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The plan is working so well.

Mr. Bob Delaney: The plan is indeed working extremely well. What else would you want to do? Our members opposite are talking about cutting taxes. Let's look at what Ontario has done in the realm of cutting taxes, because we know the PC Party has a one-point plan, and that's to cut taxes.

Ontario has already implemented \$3 billion in tax cuts and rebates. That's already done.

We have already eliminated the capital tax for manufacturers and resource sectors and made it retroactive, which flows money directly into the coffers of companies that need it most now. There's no point in cutting taxes to companies that are losing money and therefore are not paying taxes, but a retroactive tax cut actually put money in the hands of the people who needed it most.

We cut business education taxes and we—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Can I ask the member to please get back to the motion?

1630

Mr. Bob Delaney: All right. Let's stay on our topic here.

So, Speaker, in this motion here, one of the outcomes of it is going to be to discuss, among other things, is it possible to reduce the regulatory burden? And among the

things that we can expect to be discussed in committee is the fact that the paper burden has already been reduced by 24%. Maybe people have some suggestions for how to bring it down even more. We can bring out to Ontarians the fact that corporate tax collection has already been harmonized with the federal government and the savings to businesses are more than \$100 million a year; that service guarantees, something that people ask me about, have already been implemented to boost service with taxpayers.

Now, the Leader of the Opposition, in an article just this week, talked about restraint in the public sector, and of course, we agree. However, we are not going to fire water inspectors, fire nurses, lay off teachers, fire meat inspectors like the Conservatives did.

We do agree with the concept of working with our overlapping governments. Almost certainly, during the committee's hearings, people will bring this point out. It isn't realistic to expect that one level of government, such as the feds, are going to trash-talk the engine of the Canadian economy, such as Ontario.

Speaker, in conclusion, I'd like to thank you for the time and for the opportunity to respond to some of the comments that have been made and to set out what I hope is going to be a realistic set of consultations by the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs this month.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I appreciate the comments, and I do apologize for losing my patience earlier, but you know, this is painful to listen to at times—very, very painful. This motion—they make it sound as though the budget's almost being set between December 15 and 19, the five days when they travel to Niagara Falls—where are we going, here, on that date? Anyhow, we've got five particular locations. Do you know when the report writing is due? When do you think it's due? February 19, two months later. It's not due on January 1. It's not due on January 3. It's due after their famous screwed-up—what do you call it?—Family Day situation, where half the people get Family Day and half the people don't get it. That's what they've got. We have an eight- or nine-week period where the committee is not meeting. There's an opportunity, in that particular period of time, to meet with many, many other communities across the province. What is the rush?

The member from Mississauga just mentioned that we were opposed to meeting before Christmas. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have no problem meeting December 15 to December 19. That's not a problem. We want to meet after that. We want to meet in January and February, for that eight weeks that's there, so we can work up to the budget. The budget's not going to be delivered on January 15 or 16 or March 20 or whatever. The report writing's not due until February 19, so there's absolutely no rush.

The reason we have it between December 15 and 19? They're trying to hide it in the Christmas season, plain

and simple. They don't want any controversy. They know that students are still in school. They know that the school boards are getting ready for Christmas presentations and school concerts and all that sort of thing, and you want to hide; that's what you want to do. You actually want to hide that week.

Why else would you not want to meet after Christmas? Can anybody possibly explain that? You've got eight weeks. You've got eight weeks before you have to meet. So why would you hide? And that's what we've got—because they're afraid of what's coming at them.

They inherited a fantastic economy from the Mike Harris government, over one million net new jobs created, and what have they done in that time? They have raised taxes \$29 billion. They've raised taxes \$2,300 for every man, woman and child in this province—\$2,300. Imagine what that would do. But they've wasted and wasted and wasted.

And yet, when I go to my Midland Area Reading Council, they're not getting any more money. When I talk about the Treasure Island Day Care Centre at the OPP headquarters that are being kicked out, there's no money to help them relocate, and this is the government that cares about children. Where is the money going? Twenty-three hundred dollars, ladies and gentlemen: \$2,300 is how much you have raised taxes.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: How many schools have you—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: You know what? "How many schools" is right. The number of students is decreasing. That's the only reason they have a smaller per class average, because there are not as many kids in the schools, plain and simple. Everyone knows that. The minister herself said we have, like, 90,000 fewer students around, so naturally the average size of the class goes down.

It's pretty pathetic when the member stands there and talks about the ideological problems with the Harris government or Ronald Reagan or any conservative-minded individual in this country or on this continent. They criticize us because we actually created a strong economy. You will remember that when Mike Harris started out in government in 1995, there was a \$12-billion deficit. That's what it was.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I would just remind the member to speak as much as possible to the motion that's on the floor.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Like the previous member did. Okay. So what I'll say, then—actually, I'd like to talk about where this committee could go and where they have been in the last five years. Let's say, for example, since 2000, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs has travelled to—of course, it has been here in Toronto. It has been to Kenora, Timmins, Brockville, Chatham, Niagara Falls, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Cobourg, Waterloo, Barrie, London, Sudbury, and the list goes on and on. We also can add Peterborough, Atikokan, Sarnia and Guelph as a few other locations that the committee went to.

There would be time, Madam Speaker, to visit some of those communities—not all of them, but we don't

have to have it all done in one week. We, the PC caucus—I personally would be happy and proud to sit on that committee between December 15 and 19, but I would like to go out on the road after as well, in January and February, because, as I said earlier, we do have eight weeks at least. We actually have seven weeks after New Year's Day to travel with this particular bill, and there's no reason we can't do it. As I said earlier, this is no more than a case of this government hiding from the general public on the standing committee on economic affairs.

Now, my suggestion is—obviously they're going to pass it; they've got a majority—we'll do our own. We'll go out and we'll listen to the general public. We can put together a committee. If members of the third party want to join in, they can. We can visit those communities. We can travel around the province and we can find out what the people in Ontario want.

I personally hold two pre-budget consultations in my particular riding, in both Midland and Orillia. I spend half a day at both of them. I have at least 25 to 30 deputations in each of those communities that come forward. They are organizations that never get an opportunity to be invited to the Toronto hearings because, in a lot of cases, there's a lot of poverty involved; they don't have the finances available to travel. So they actually come and are able to speak in our communities.

I would recommend to anybody—I know the government members won't want to hear it, but certainly to any members of the official opposition and of the third party—I think it would be a wise idea if you were to hold pre-budget consultations in your own communities, in your own ridings, and listen to what the general public has to say. The government? They don't want to hear what they have to say. Clearly, that's the case.

This is a motion that is deliberately hiding this committee from the people of the province of Ontario, and they should be ashamed of themselves for bringing a motion like this forward. If we have to meet earlier, as I said earlier, so be it. We can meet earlier and through that week, but later on go out on the road in the winter.

I wanted to also talk about some of the problems they're facing. Obviously, they have no idea what they are doing in the automotive sector. You're hearing different comments each and every day from either the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Economic Development or the Premier, so I don't think we've actually got any kind of a plan there.

But I got a kick out of the five-point plan, the lower taxes for businesses. Bill 119: \$11,000 is a tax increase for the average business—\$11,000 and you're going to lower taxes for business? You're trying to put people out of business. That's what this is all about. You have a hatred for small business for some reason. That seems to be the case. Why do we have that?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I would ask you to withdraw that remark, please. You're suggesting that the government has a motive of hatred. I think that's inappropriate. I'd ask you to withdraw, please.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Okay, I'll withdraw the word "hatred."

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): That's fine.

1640

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: What I would like to say is this: There's a problem with this government and small business, particularly the construction business, or we wouldn't see Bill 119 even out there today. That has been a real problem.

We've also seen it with the way they've treated the apprenticeship ratios in the province of Ontario. There's an opportunity to create more jobs, to get more young people into trades, and what do we do? We have this ridiculous 3-to-1 ratio, and the minister refuses to move on it. Do you know what? We're going to have to get back in government, which we probably will in three years' time, to actually change that ratio.

These are the types of things I see. I see it with the small convenience stores. In fact, there's actually a saying out there in the business community now: "the endangered species." What would they be? Well, they'd be small business operators, convenience stores, the agricultural community. We created legislation around the Endangered Species Act, but now the endangered species are the very businesses that operate this province, the people who have created the jobs since this country and province were formed. Now we have tremendous pressure on them from all different angles, and this government forces their way through with legislation like Bill 119. It's very, very discouraging.

Get this: I've even heard today that Mr. Mahoney, the chairman of WSIB, is out on a tour trying to promote it. He's actually going to be in the town of Midland tonight. Sometime in January—I guess he's not worried about the prebudget problems—he'll be in the city of Orillia. He's out there promoting all the wonderful things WSIB is doing. I wonder who sent him out there. Do you think he just went on his own this time? Do you think maybe he has gone out because of the pressure of Bill 119? I think so. Was he not appointed? Mr. Mahoney was a former MPP, wasn't he? Anyway, he was appointed by this government to that high-paying job, and there he is doing the job today, and he's out on a tour to say how wonderful WSIB is. He should drop into our constituency offices. We'll give him some files that he can take back and actually correct for once. I'd be happy if he would drop in to the riding of Simcoe North, at 14 Coldwater Road in Orillia, when he's there. And if he wants to drop in to Elizabeth Street in Midland, my other office, we'll give him some files on WSIB, when he's doing his grand tour.

Moving on with this motion, I'm disappointed that we've come to the point where we have to hide behind a religious time of the year, a time when families get together, and close debate at that particular time for political and partisan purposes. If someone can tell me why we can't meet that week, the week before, the 15th to the 19th, and then come back, say, the second week of January and have this committee travel on the road for

two weeks or three weeks and get a complete feel for how the citizens of the province feel about the economy—I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I would hope that the government would at least consider that when they hear our comments. I don't think the finance critic for the third party agrees with me on this. It sounded like he wanted to get it all done today and get this on its way. I personally feel that we have to have a lot more on something as important as this budget, a \$90-billion budget.

A couple of the members mentioned here earlier today that they inherited a \$5.6-billion deficit. Let's just zero in on that for a second, because obviously that must have a major impact on how this motion is worded and why they feel that way. For example, that was halfway through the year, in the 2003-04 budget. I don't ever hear the members from the government talk about the blackout that year. I don't hear them talking about SARS, which had a major impact on the economy. You'll all remember SARS Fest and trying to get people back into the city of Toronto and areas so that they could try to get the economy rolling again. There were all kinds of hotel discounts. I know the Rolling Stones and AC/DC came here for free to try to get the economy rolling. I never hear them mention any of those things in their conversations. Of course, they won government by September of that year. Did they try to work on that deficit? No. They just spent their way—and they never quit taxing and spending from that particular point on.

Now, here we have a government that has got to a point where we have a \$90-billion budget. It's up \$2,300 per person, or \$29 billion, a 41% increase in spending, and now they've run out of money. The economy is going sour on them, and they have no idea what to do. They were warned over and over again about how they were mismanaging the money, and that's what I feel is the biggest problem here. They have done a wonderful job of working with the media and making sure the media got lots of big full-page advertisements and that sort of thing in all the little papers across the province so they wouldn't write negative articles against the government. That's how I feel about it, anyways, because all these little papers get large ads.

The adoption disclosure bill, for example, has been out there for weeks; up in my area, the Lake Simcoe Act. Instead of having an ad that big or an ad the size that we use for the notification of pre-budget consultation meetings or the ads we use for committee hearings, we're having full-page ads in these papers, and that has to be tens of millions of dollars alone right there that have been spent by this government, as we advertise all these wonderful things the government's doing. I don't see any reason.

The other one, of course, is this retraining program. Has anybody followed that? There are literally ads every 15 minutes on all of the major TV outlets advertising this retraining program. I want to know who they're retraining. I haven't seen anybody. I don't know one person in my riding who has gone forward and applied for that or

has been successful in that. Maybe we could get a list from the minister or from the ministry and see who is actually taking advantage of this. One thing we know for sure is that millions and millions of dollars have been spent on advertising for this program, and that's federal money that was sent down to the province to waste. That's what it's all about. It's like the \$340 million from the labour market agreement that we hear about over and over again. That was a special deal. It was all signed. Where's the \$340 million? I'm sorry, I correct myself; it's \$311 million, effective April 1 of this year.

There are a lot of people in training, colleges and universities and all the different transfer agencies that are wondering what happened to that money. That would be something that I think would be important for the minister to actually answer someday, either at estimates or question period, because that's a lot of money that should be wisely spent in that particular ministry around reading centres, literacy councils, college tuition, whatever it may be. We need to make sure we look at those sorts of things.

So I'm saying that, although the government has run into problems with their revenues, and there's no question there's a forecasted \$500-million deficit for this year, we all know it's going to be a lot higher than that by the time the budget actually rolls around. Those are the kinds of things they don't want to answer to the people in the province at the standing committee hearings, whether they're in any of these communities that I suggested earlier that they go to. They don't want to know that their budgets are actually going to be cut, because that's what's going to happen or there's going to be a huge deficit. I don't think anybody is going to get any more money. That would be my understanding of how it's working right now.

I think they've run into a terrible economic system, and they were warned. They've had five years of good sailing. As I said earlier, they inherited a strong economy, a very strong economy, and they've taken that economy by tax-and-spend, tax-and-spend, tax-and-spend, the same as we've seen everywhere they've gone in the past, both at the federal and provincial level, and now with tough times they're looking for people to blame. Every second day they turn and blame it on five years ago. People are saying, "Pretty soon you're going to go back to Sir John A. Macdonald. It must have been his fault." Was he not a Conservative? I think he was. That type of thing.

We keep standing in this House and trying to voice our concerns almost to a deaf ear. It's the same as in my particular critic's portfolio. We have a need for money there and there's \$156 million that has been sent from the federal government to that particular ministry, the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. They signed on the dotted line. They said that they would agree to the conditions of the \$156 million they sent to them. Now every time the minister gives a speech anywhere, whether it's in this House or whether it's at a stakeholder relations event or talking to some of the

transfer groups out there like the PAO or OPPA, for example, he talks about how bad the federal government is and how they cheated him out of money. The reality is he signed on the dotted line; he agreed to the amount of money that was being sent. He didn't have to sign to that; he didn't have to agree to that. But we turn around and we listen over and over again to these concerns that I think are completely unfounded.

1650

As we move forward with this debate, I'm one of the people in this House—I think the debate should carry on for four or five days or to its maximum, or at least until they time-allocate it, because it's unfair to the people in the province of Ontario. They've been overtaxed to a high degree, and now they've got terrible economic conditions in front of them.

They are going to try to hide from the general public with even these pre-budget consultation meetings, having them the week before Christmas when all the plays and Christmas events and receptions and everything are on. I feel sick as a parliamentarian having to put up with this kind of nonsense at a time like this, when you should show leadership.

We should show leadership. We should be out there as much as possible with this committee. It's a very, very important committee. And do you know what? They don't have to report back until February 19, and what are we going to do? We're going to basically time-allocate the committee for five days, let them go on a long winter vacation for six or seven weeks and then come back and write their report. It will be all over, and the government won't have been accountable and transparent to the citizens of Ontario.

I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words today. I encourage everyone in the House, including the Liberal members, to take part in this debate; it's very, very important. It is the history. It is the future of our province and our children to make sure we get this thing right, not by hiding from the general population for six or seven weeks this winter.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Normally, I love to take my 20 minutes or hour to debate issues, but this is not an issue where I want to spend more than a couple of minutes, and I want to explain why.

First of all, this debate is about whether we have enough time in December to debate issues as people come in front of the finance committee, or whether we need more time in January. The point is, the government is not going to change its mind. They clearly want this out of the way, and I understand that. The four days of debate are not going to change that. These four days are not going to politicize anyone. Nobody is listening to what we have to say, except for the devoted people who watch this political channel. Nobody is going to storm Queen's Park to say, "We want more hearings in January." No one is going to do that. What will punish the government is the recession. I've got proof.

In 1990, we got punished so badly, we didn't need hearings, and God, did we have hearings. But did we

need hearings to get beaten up? No. The recession beats up on government members whether they like it or not. Whether it's in December or January, it's going to happen to them. They're going to get whacked.

So what I want to say to my Tory friends in a few seconds is this: They have nothing to debate. They love this motion. The parliamentary assistant took a whole hour. I've never seen him do that before. He took a whole hour to debate nothing. Then the member from Mississauga—Streetsville took 20 minutes to blah, blah, blah, and some other Liberal is going to speak for another 20 minutes to blah, blah, blah. About what, I don't know. They have nothing to bring forth to debate, and you fine Tories are giving these people four days to debate a motion that, in the end, is not going to amount to much.

My view is, let's end this debate, let's force the Liberals to bring some bills that we can debate, and I guarantee they've got nothing. They have absolutely nothing to debate, and that's why they're happy to stretch this out over an eight-hour period.

So for my time, that's it. I don't want to give any more of my time to give credit to this motion that the Liberals have introduced or to support the Tories that I think are way off base. The Liberals will be punished. That's what recessions do, they punish governments, and they're not going to like it, I guarantee it. Whether it's December, January, February, March, it won't mean anything.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Not 20 minutes.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: And thanks to the member from Trinity-Spadina for prejudging my time as to how long I will take, but no, I will not speak 20 minutes on this. I am not going to participate in further fostering the cynicism that exists towards politicians by engaging in a debate that is not needed, that is not required.

I actually find myself in agreement with my friend from Beaches—East York in saying that this is a time when we need to work together. We all need to roll up our sleeves and get down to work, because we are going through unprecedented times. I spoke to exactly that theme on October 20, when I urged all members of this Legislature to stop pointing fingers at each other, to bring ourselves together collectively. We are all very smart people. We have a duty and a responsibility to our constituents to work together to make sure we come up with good ideas and creative solutions.

This is the time we need to do that. This is exactly the time when we need to demonstrate leadership, when we need to demonstrate that we can rise above petty partisanship and get down to work. We are facing some really unprecedented times, something I can definitely claim I have not seen in my lifetime. In order for us to be able to deal with these economic challenges, we need to ensure that we work together, that we don't spend our time in this Legislature debating a motion about when we go out and actually talk to people about how to deal with this economic reality. I'm shocked that the official opposition has brought this issue to the point where we have

to be in this Legislature debating this, as opposed to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs being outside this building, talking to Ontarians.

This is a deepening economic crisis. I, like I think all of you who have been speaking with your constituents on a daily basis, know that people are concerned. People are scratching their heads, trying to figure out what is going on. We are hearing things like deflation, inflation, stagnation—stuff that most people really don't understand. Deficit structure versus cyclical—what does that mean? What they're looking for is leadership, guidance and reassurance that we will get through this, that their government, their parliamentarians, their legislators are working on this really important, critical issue.

As we also know, this is not a made-in-Ontario problem. This is not even a made-in-Canada problem. This is a global issue. This is an issue where the 20 biggest leaders around the world are sitting together, discussing and trying to figure a way out.

A couple of weeks ago, the opposition was trying to make the argument that this is a recession somehow created by Dalton McGuinty, or that this is a deficit that is being incurred by Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal government. Just today, we found out that the Prime Minister said, "Guess what, folks? Canada is already in a recession. Guess what, folks? Canada will be incurring a massive deficit." Interestingly, I don't hear the official opposition talking today about how we are in a Harper recession or how we're going to be facing a Harper deficit.

This just goes to show that these are bigger challenges; these are issues that are beyond the scope of Canada and beyond the scope of Ontario. This is why it is even more imperative that all of us work together and try to find those creative, out-of-the-box ideas and solutions to the problem at hand.

I was actually quite heartened today to read in the newspaper that the Prime Minister is now talking about an economic stimulus package, exactly the kind of stimulus package this government brought out months and months ago and has been talking about again and again: the five-point stimulus package investing almost \$10 billion in our public infrastructure through the Investing in Ontario Act—\$77 million to Ottawa alone, \$238 million to the city of Toronto, and across the province. Why? To ensure that we invest in our public infrastructure, and that we stimulate our economy by creating jobs. It's good to see that the Prime Minister is now talking exactly the same, that we need to make sure we invest in our economy, that we invest in our society. It's something that I think gives absolute credence to the actions and measures this government has been doing all along and arguing in this Legislature.

We need to get out of this chamber and hear from Ontarians now. This is a crisis that is developing and deepening every single day.

Ontarians are worried. This is not a matter of Christmas, before Christmas or after Christmas; this is a matter of getting out there and listening to Ontarians so that this

Legislature, the finance minister, the cabinet and the government can take appropriate actions as we move forward.

1700

We don't need to wait until January or February, when it's convenient for us to go and find out what Ontarians are thinking, while they spend their holidays all worried. We need to do that now. What's wrong with our going out and listening to Ontarians across this province—and it is a large province; it takes time and effort to organize to meet those Ontarians—so that this committee can deliberate, come up with a well-thought-out, comprehensive report which then can be tabled in this Legislature for debate, so that the Minister of Finance has time to review that report and to be able to take those recommendations into account when he is putting together the budget at the end of this fiscal year in March? That's reasonable.

If we go out there and talk to people—and we all do talk to our constituents—they will all say: "I can't believe you spent eight and a half hours arguing about this. Is that why we're sending you to Queen's Park?" I'd rather be in Ottawa right now, working on constituent issues, as opposed to standing here and debating whether legislators, members of the committee, should be out in the communities listening to Ontarians and trying to figure out what their concerns and issues are.

I encourage all members of this Legislature to vote in favour of this motion so that members of the committee get ample opportunity to listen to Ontarians, to hear their concerns, to answer their questions, to take in the ideas and bring that feedback to this Legislature so that we all—the Minister of Finance, the cabinet, the government—can benefit from those ideas. January or February is too late. Things are moving constantly. We need to take action now.

In the meantime, I encourage the government to keep investing in our communities. The \$77 million which was given to my community of Ottawa is going toward renewing infrastructure like the sewer system, and it's going toward the renewing of affordable housing in my community, to ensure that people have good places to live. Those are the kinds of investments we need to continue making. We need to ensure that we listen to and hear from Ontarians on whether they want these types of measures to continue as we enter into these uncertain economic times, to make sure that our families have a good quality of life which they very much deserve.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this very important matter. I really urge that we don't debate this 'till the cows come home, as the expression goes, and we move on with the business of representing our constituents and making sure this committee goes out now to hear the views of Ontarians and advise the government to take concrete actions and steps.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's not too often that we see the Liberals being so frugal. We don't often use the term

"frugality" when we speak of the Liberal government. But I'll tell you, they are absolutely frugal in allowing for debate of important subjects.

Here we see a little bit more of their frugality with debate, moving these pre-budget consultations into a week in December. Everybody knows that historically, and for good reason, pre-budget consultations happen throughout January and February to give the people of this province adequate time to convey and express their thoughts and views to the government, so that when budget time does come, they at least have an understanding of the concerns. They may not act upon it, but at least they have a comprehension level and an understanding of the concerns of the people in our province.

This is atrocious that we are going to move our budget consultation meetings into one week in December. I know my Liberal colleague from Ottawa mentioned that instead of debating, he'd be better off in Ottawa, and maybe he would be better off in Ottawa if debate on something so important as our economy will not afford us the opportunity to hear from those whom we represent in this House, the people who really have granted us authority to act on their behalf. We have an obligation and a duty to them to listen, listen intently, listen with conviction, about what it is that is important to them.

We have seen the Liberal government spend significant amounts of time debating many subjects, debating whether or not we should ban plastic water bottles, whether we should ban incandescent light bulbs, ban trans fats. These are their priorities, but when it comes to actually discussing and debating the real priorities of this province, they try to slough it off into a week in December, just before Christmas. It's no present for the people of this province when they act in this manner. You cannot wrap up the economy into a nice little bundle one week in December and expect it to be hidden from view of the people of this province.

We have an obligation, and we must take it seriously, that when budget time comes around, the budget will reflect not only the state of our economy but also the priorities of the people in this province.

I would hazard a guess, and I don't think I'm going too far out on a limb in saying that the priority in this province is our economy—our lost jobs, the downturn in the markets, the tightening credit markets, all significant, important aspects that we must take into consideration. These are the priorities of the people of this province. They ought to be the priority of the members in this Legislature, and it's inconceivable that any government will have a full comprehension and adequate level of understanding of what this province needs by one week of pre-budget consultation hearings in December.

I ask the members opposite, really, are you spending more time looking at what else you can ban, how many kids are going to be banned in cars or what other light bulbs or junk foods are going to be banned, or are you actually going to put some effort and some consideration into the priorities of the people of this province?

We've seen that just last week, 30 mayors from rural Ontario and throughout Ontario got together about the

problems that their communities are facing with this auto bailout or the state of the auto industry. To really address these problems takes a significant amount of time and energy, but it also takes interest, and that is one thing that we are sorely lacking from this government: an interest to discuss and debate and solve the problems of rural and all of Ontario.

We've seen time and time again, even this Bill 114, the budget measures that were brought in, closure of debate on significant priorities, closure of discussion and debate, and we see it happening once again. I have to ask all the members of this House, are you doing what the people of this province elected you to do when you prioritize plastic water bottles, the Lord's Prayer and light bulbs, and you bring closure to our economy, sneak through pre-budget consultation processes and diminish the role of the individuals, the businesses, the communities? You're diminishing their role in our democracy. It is not acceptable that we have on the opposite side of this House such a cavalier disregard for the interests, opinions and concerns of the people who have elected us to this House.

1710

I could go on and on about things, but I guess we have seen these trends developing for some time. It's not just overnight that we lost 200,000 jobs in manufacturing. It has been a long-term trend, but we have done nothing to solve it in this House. The Liberal government has chosen to prioritize the insignificance, prioritize the trivial, and hide from real debate and discussion, just as they are doing with this motion as well. They are hiding from their duties. They are hiding from their obligations. They are hiding from the people of this province. It is not what I expect from my fellow legislators. I am sure it is not what the people of this province expect. We expect a certain and significant level of interest by the people in this chamber to actually follow through on their election promises and the rhetoric that we have so often heard.

These trends have been a long time coming. As I said, we didn't lose 200,000 jobs overnight. Anybody with careful foresight and a vision to tomorrow would see that our economy has been heading in the wrong path for quite a period of time. Taxation levels have been increasing. Government spending has been increasing, increasing, increasing. Jobs have been lost, lost, lost. And all we heard was debate on the trivial and closure on the significant.

Once again this House, this Liberal government, brings in what amounts to a procedural closure, not a closure on debate like they did with their economic Bill 114, not a closure on debate like they did with Bill 119 and the WSIB. This is a closure of process—restricting, preventing and limiting people from engaging their elected representatives in the most fundamental elements of democracy: access to their elected representatives and a means and a vehicle to express their concerns.

The priority of the people of Ontario is not to diminish our democracy, as the Liberals would like us to believe. The priority of the people of this province is to have an

open, transparent and functioning democracy, not what we are getting from this Liberal government, Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Speaker? Excuse me—

Interjection: Madam Speaker.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Madam Speaker.

Interjection: You got the right one.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I got the right one eventually; sorry about that. My apologies.

I guess that's an important thing for all of us to understand: We all recognize we can make mistakes. We should apologize when we make those mistakes and not do them again.

This Liberal government errs, makes mistakes, and then they laugh. The honourable member opposite likes to laugh at this important subject, likes to laugh at closure of democracy, laugh at the process of democracy. Same with the honourable member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, I believe—he likes to laugh at the priorities and the importance of—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Order.

Mr. Randy Hillier: This is an important element. The most important element of democracy, as I said earlier, is access to elected representatives, not closure. I am sure that when the members opposite go home and see their constituents, there should be and probably will be some hanging of heads on this session. However, we on this side of the House have a deep and unwavering commitment that process in democracy and objectives be held firm, be closely guarded, and we will be opposing this motion. We will be opposing the Liberal idea that they can diminish democracy because they have a majority. That's not the way it works.

I do hope that members opposite take some time to reflect on what actually they're doing. Do not cower in front of the whip. Do not hide and shirk your duties. Stand up for the people that you represent, just the way we do on this side of the House. Stand up and say, "We are going to do the right thing, not the wrong thing. We are not going to do what is politically expeditious." You're going to do the right thing, and that is to stand up for the people of this province, allow them to express their voice, give them the opportunity to let you know what their priorities are and provide the avenue for them to express those opinions fully and in a manner that is suitable and appropriate in a democracy.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm pleased to join today's debate because I think it's very important that we have a fulsome discussion on the state of our economy. Our Prime Minister stated, just in recent days, that the world economy has not seen anything quite like the instability it's seeing since 1929. It's almost a century. I think that desperate times call for desperate measures.

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I will allow them to continue to heckle, and that's fine, because I really, really am concerned about the state of our economy. I think that it is

important that we speak to all Ontarians when we move forward in how our response to this world economic crisis will be.

I want to give you a few examples of how important travelling with this committee is to my constituents. Each year that I've been elected, representatives from my city and from my riding have been able to take part in the consultations that ultimately became part of a report to the Minister of Finance on how to conduct business in this province.

I'll give you an example from the first year that I was elected, Madam Speaker. As you well know, in 2006 I ran against a New Democrat, Laurel Gibbons, whose son has autism. I made a commitment to Laurel the night of my victory that I'd be her voice on autism matters here at Queen's Park. You know that I have worked hard on that issue, not only here at Queen's Park but also in my own riding. Myself, Laurel Gibbons and a city councillor named Jan Harder in Nepean-Carleton got together and decided we would talk to the province about the need to adequately fund autism resources in the province. The eastern Ontario consultation for the finance and economic affairs committee was in Belleville, so we travelled together to Belleville to talk about the importance of this issue. It was a great opportunity for us, as a community, to talk about the needs that we had identified in our community, the shortcomings, and a way for us to move forward. It was a great opportunity for us to talk to the government as just regular community members, to say that the government of the day needed to address this health issue.

1720

We were happy, then, to see that not only did our party, the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, address the issue of autism in our 2007 platform—and I give a lot of credit to my colleague Christine Elliott and my other colleague Frank Klees for working with me in putting together an autism platform which I think was probably among the best of the three parties'—but in addition to that, the other political parties also worked on this issue and included measures in their platforms for treating children with autism. In a very significant way, I believe, it came from these types of presentations.

As importantly, of course, we realized we weren't getting money from the provincial government to fund our autism centre, so in the true spirit of the people from Nepean-Carleton, and in the true spirit of what we would do, we relied on ourselves: self-reliance, which is a key component of the lifestyles of those of us who live in Nepean-Carleton. What we did was we worked very hard to raise \$38,000 for the first year of programming for the South Nepean Autism Centre.

I want to go back to last year, during times when we needed to consult with our constituents regarding the finance and economic affairs committee and its report, ultimately, to the finance minister.

We all have issues in our ridings, and some of these issues don't isolate themselves in Nepean-Carleton or Ottawa-Vanier or Northumberland; they tend to be systemic. It's an opportunity, when we travel, to look at

issues. For example, I have four mobile home parks in my riding. One of the mobile home parks has had water quality problems for the past 30 years. Selenium content is too high, sodium content is too high, and the water is just undrinkable; it's not potable. The aesthetics are terrible.

So last year, during the finance and economic affairs committee hearings, and of course, ultimately, in the report-writing and in our recommendations, I was able to put forward recommendations that would have assisted mobile home park owners right across this province who are confronted with the high prices of testing their own water that goes into their mobile home park, though it's on land that's privately owned. It didn't pass, but it was an opportunity for my community to be part of the consultation in this province on where our budget would eventually go.

It is matters like these—and I had another initiative which I thought was a good idea, because, as you know, and I'm very proud of this, my riding has some of the highest birth rates in the entire country. In south Nepean, in Greely and Riverside South, there's a very high growth area with high birth rates, and there are a lot of young families. So one of the other initiatives, which was brought in by my colleague's husband at the federal level, is the sports registration tax credit. The previous minister of public health promotion, I guess—he was the health promotion minister—had actually said he was going to bring in the same sort of tax credit here provincially. He didn't, but we were able to talk about that as a segment of society, as young mothers and young fathers who are confronted with the skyrocketing costs of hockey and ballet and all those other things that we like our children to be part of but that are becoming increasingly difficult for our families to fund because of the current economic circumstances.

So when we talk about going to committee in the good times, even during the good times we have solid recommendations coming from our communities at these consultations. But sadly, my friends, we're not faced with the good times.

Mr. Mike Colle: Are you having a good time?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: We all remember the good times, Mr. Colle, but—

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Let the good times roll.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Unfortunately, the good times aren't rolling, Mr. Flynn. Unfortunately, we are faced with economic circumstances sometimes beyond our control, other times not. We have to hear from the people across this province.

Granted, the Liberals may not want to hear some of the messages. In recent days, we've been hearing from the 20,000 young men and women who have joined a Facebook group opposing their new drivers' legislation. My own office, although I am nowhere near York University, has received close to 200 e-mails opposing this government's action in recent days.

Interjection: Or lack of it.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Or lack of it, my colleague points out.

The reality is, just because we don't want to hear something does not mean it doesn't need to be said.

My colleague Tim Hudak from Niagara West—Glanbrook, who is also our finance critic, has proposed that we travel to 19 other communities in the province of Ontario. Those who don't support this resolution say that we should just get on with the business of passing the government's bill because it's going to happen anyway, or that we want to stall, or whatever.

The bottom line is, if we're to be responsible in this chamber, we ought to be having the discussion with everyday Ontarians.

In fact, this morning when I was on the flight here from Ottawa, I was talking to somebody who worked at the Ottawa Hospital—my colleague Mr. McNeely will know that oftentimes when we fly to Toronto, we see people who are coming here for meetings, whether they're in the health care sector or the transportation sector or what have you—and I was remarking, as one of the newer members of the assembly, on how disappointed I was in the response to the economy, because I thought it would've been very important for us in this chamber to really debate the substance of the day.

As my colleague Mr. Hillier notes, many times when we want to discuss budgetary or economic measures, closure is forced. We're expected to rush through and not have fulsome debate. When we want to consult further with Ontarians, we're told, "No, we need to do this within a week and a half so that we can meet the deadlines."

Personally, I think that this chamber should be handling things much the way we are in the government agencies committee, which is bringing in agencies of the crown that are responsible to this assembly and asking them for briefings on how it is going to impact the economy. That's actually no different than the committee of finance and economic affairs going out and consulting with everyday Ontarians.

Let me give you two examples of how we're dealing with this very critical issue of consultation and briefings and ensuring that every legislator is brought up to speed so that they can adequately make the tough decisions that we are called upon to make. Tomorrow, the committee that I sit on—I don't see any of my other committee members here, but they will tell you, regardless of political party, that we have brought in Infrastructure Ontario twice. We're now writing a report with recommendations that are going to be very solid, that have to deal with the very tough economic circumstances we're dealing with in this province and how we can move forward. We'll bring them in again, and that's important for every member of this Legislature to know. The government agencies committee will invite Infrastructure Ontario back to our committee so that they can provide all members of this Legislature with a briefing.

Similarly, we will be bringing in the Ontario Securities Commission on December 2. This is critical in these tough economic times when we see people's investments being lost, when we see families wondering how they're

going to pay their mortgage, put food on the table and pay for their kids' education. It's important that the financial systems which we have built, not only in this country, but also in this province, are accountable to the people we represent. So we'll be bringing in the Ontario Securities Commission. They will be offering us a full briefing, and I invite every member of Legislature to attend that briefing. Have your questions in hand, because there is probably no greater issue that we are going to be confronted with in this Ontario Legislature in the 2003-11 period than the state of our provincial, our national and our world economies.

1730

No matter how much members opposite may want to try to hide things under the rug, put their heads in the sand or cover their ears, the sad reality is that over 200,000 people have lost their jobs since they've taken office. That means there are people this Christmas who aren't going to be able to afford the things they'd like to for their children. It also means, in some cases, that they're not going to be able to put food on the table. I don't need to consult widely to know that, because those calls are already coming in to my office. But I'm going to tell you something: If we are going to confront this situation together—the challenges our economy faces, the challenges Ontario workers face, the challenges Ontario families face—we'd better be listening to the families, the workers and the people of this province.

I have more faith in the people of Ontario than I do in the government of the day. It's through them and their hard work that jobs are created; it's through them and their hard work that they put food on the table to feed their families; and it's through them and their hard work that they can send their children on to higher education so that they can once again make this province Canada's economic engine.

I want to speak to that, because I think that if we were to travel to all these important communities, we would learn so much. We would learn about the forestry sector, the manufacturing sector, the health care sector, small trades, the independent business people—all those people who are trying to make ends meet. Again, the Liberals may not like what they hear, but the story needs to be told.

My colleague Mr. Hillier remarked about democracy. We have rules in this place, obviously, and one of my favourite comments actually came from an old Conservative senator my husband used to work for, Senator Mike Forrestall. He spent over 42 years in the Senate—

Mr. Jeff Leal: He was from Halifax, wasn't he?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: He was from Dartmouth, very close. He spent seven elections in the House of Commons and then was appointed to the Senate. He would often remark, because he got to sit on both sides for so long—he sat in opposition and in government; heck, he even saw the Conservative Party down to two seats. But he would always say, "The rules in democracy are to prevent the tyranny of the majority over the minority."

What we often see in cases with this government is that they do try to subvert our rights and the rules that

protect us, in the minority, to have free and full discussion of the important matters of the day. I think this is just one more case where they have subverted our abilities as lawmakers.

I personally would like to appeal to the government today to do something innovative. When we look to our colleagues to the south, in the United States of America, what are they doing right now? They tend to have consultation; they tend to debate the important matters. As my colleague Mr. Hillier said, we're relegated to banning water bottles; we're relegated to taking away the ability for kids to drive freely, even though they've been given a provincial privilege; and we're told that over the two-and-a-half-month recess we're about to have, we can't talk to Ontarians about the economy, arguably the most important issue our province will face in the period from 2003 to 2011.

I'm admittedly a newer member of this chamber, but I know when there's an issue that's bigger than me and every other member in this Legislature. It's the economy, and it's impacting so many other people. It's larger than all of us, and it's important that we make a decision in this chamber to ensure that every Ontarian's voice is heard during these difficult times. I'm not sure how I feel about trying to ram this debate through just before Christmas, when parents are going to be preoccupied with feeding their children and not with debating public policy of the day. I think that out of respect for the people of this province, we ought to be consulting them. If the Liberal government of our day were to be truly innovative, truly caring of this situation, they would make great efforts to reach out to those who are in need right now, those who have lost their jobs, those who are worried that they have lost their life savings, those who don't know where their next mortgage payment is going to come from.

I often tell people in this chamber that I came here from a have-not province, Nova Scotia. That's where I was born, that's where I was raised and that's where I was educated. I came here to create a life. I remember when I came to Ontario it was the height of the Mike Harris revolution, the Common Sense Revolution.

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Wow. You'll remember, that's when one million jobs were created by the hard-working people of this province—by the people of the province, not by the government of the day. At the time, the great thing about the Harris Common Sense Revolution was that it put self-reliance—and I talked earlier about communities creating communities, communities creating jobs, people working hard and being proud of it. That was a time when Ontario's economy was the fastest-growing economy, the strongest economy, the best economy of Confederation, and for all of the talk and the baffling and the reason these people don't want to consult is because they have taken Mike Harris's work, Jim Flaherty's work and Norm Sterling's work in an Ontario that was number one in its class to sitting at the back of the classroom. The reason they don't want to consult is

because of that. They don't want to talk to Ontarians because they don't want to hear the truth.

The fact of the matter is, they have squandered Ontario's strong, rich history as Canada's economic engine, and I'm going to tell you something, Madam Speaker: We need to have that discussion with the people in this province, the people who have elected us. Sadly for our good friends in the government, they will be rewarded in a way in which they wish they were not come 2011.

Again, I appeal to them and I request that they consider their actions by forcing through this committee and their earlier actions of moving forward without substantive debate—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: It's a great pleasure to join this debate. I think there's something going on with regard to the strategy of the government to have these hearings take place prior to January and February of next year, and I don't think it's a motivation that should be condoned or accepted by members of this Legislature.

First of all, there have been many motions put forward in this Legislature by the opposition to have meaningful debate by a select committee to deal with this economic crisis that we now have. I would have preferred that a select committee deal with this particular issue over a period of time, as many of the issues that we now face in the province of Ontario are complicated, need serious study and need serious recommendation to the government. We also need to hear from many different people who are involved in many different sectors across the province of Ontario. We are going to need their help to find resolutions to problems which we have not faced in my lifetime or my time in this Legislature, which has been considerable.

1740

The problem, first, with the finance committee of this Legislature dealing with the pre-budget consultations is this: This budget is going to be different from almost any other budget we have seen. There are going to have to be considerations in this budget which no other government has had to deal with. The considerations are going to be: Should we go into deficit, should we be spending money, and what should we be spending that money on if we, in fact, do go into deficit? There's no sense in going into deficit if we're not going to resolve the problems that are on hand.

The history of the finance committee of this Legislature is, I would say, not that great. We have, really, three different finance committees that are in our structure. We have the finance committee, which does pre-budget consultation; we have the estimates committee, which looks at the budget allocations of ministries—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Can I just ask the members to keep their conversations to a minimum. I'm having a difficult time hearing the member. Thank you.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Perhaps, Madam Speaker, that's one of the disarming parts about this Legislature.

The government has made up its mind and doesn't listen to debate, and makes up its mind prior to the debate and, therefore, a lot of the public and members wonder why we do debate.

Notwithstanding that, we have three finance committees of this Legislature, three standing committees. One is the finance committee, which we're talking about today; the second one is the estimates committee, which deals with the ongoing budget; and the third committee, of which you are a member, Madam Speaker, is the public accounts committee, which deals with expenditures that have been made and the auditor has criticized, and so we look back. So, one is forward-looking, one is supposed to be present, which is the estimates committee, and one is after the fact, which tries to go back and say to the ministries and the bureaucracy, "How can you address the problems brought forward by the Auditor General?"

I want to talk briefly about what happens on the finance committee. I served on this committee for a couple of years in the early 1990s. Other members of this Legislature who have also been members of this finance committee find that, in a given day, you would have maybe 15 or 20 people come in in front of the committee, and there might be a couple of interesting briefs with regard to a particular matter but, generally speaking, it is those people who are receiving money from the government—the transferees, agents, municipalities, hospital sector, education sector, social services sector—who all come to that particular committee and say, "We need more. We want more money." That's basically the tenor of what happens in the finance committee. So you're sitting there as a member of the Legislature and saying, "Okay, we're going to get another request for more money." I really wonder, what is the purpose of listening to all of this when we're not going to have any more money to give? In fact, given even the expenditures this year—which, I might add, according to the last statement given by our finance minister, are going up by 6%—there just isn't going to be any more money. So what is the purpose of all of this in terms of what we're going to do?

Having said that, it's part of the tradition of this Legislature to have the finance committee and listen to it. Now, my suspicion is that the reason the government wants to do this before Christmas is that the revenues of this province are plummeting so quickly that the news is going to get out in February and March, and if you opened up a meeting to the public to come forward, this government would get dumped on big time by the people who have watched the irrational spending increases that we've had over the last five years by this government, increases of 8% per year of spending. That's what they've done: 8% per year of spending. When the economy has expanded, nominally, by 4%—that doesn't take into account inflation—they have increased spending by 8%.

Peterson did the same thing as McGuinty did. It's a mirror image of what David Peterson did from 1985 to 1990. He increased spending dramatically, creating ex-

pectations in the public that we could sustain that kind of spending, and offering more and more services, expanding more services, being less careful with the taxpayers' dollars than ever before. And we've seen exactly the same thing happen here. We all know what happened in 1990. The revenues dropped like a bombshell, and that's what's happening right now, here, as we speak.

But here's what's going to happen, what I predict is going to happen in the next month or so. We're doing this now because the committee is not going to be able to sit in January and February, because we're going to be prorogued. That's what's going to happen. When you prorogue a Parliament—and I was asked by one of the newer members, "What does 'prorogue' mean?" What that means is, you end this session of this Parliament. You cut off all the bills, and all the committees are cut off, save and except if you pass a motion before we leave here, perhaps on December 11, to retain that committee sitting during the intercession.

What this government is going to do is, they want to have these hearings so they can say they've had these hearings and talked to the public about the budget process, when in fact it won't be anything about the key questions which I outlined before, which are: What spending should occur? What things can we hold up or wait for? How can we create jobs in the interim that will have a long-term good effect on our province of Ontario?

Once January comes, this government can prorogue—not only when they're sitting in the Legislature here, but the Premier can prorogue at any time he wants. What's going to happen is that Dalton McGuinty is going to prorogue this Parliament on January 15 or some date like that. That will mean that we don't come back on February 17, which is what the parliamentary calendar says we do, and the Parliament will be called sometime near the 1st of April, when they can figure out what to do next.

In the three months that we're talking about, from the time we leave here on December 11 and when this committee would sit, or whatever it is, there's not going to be an opportunity for any member of this Legislature or a committee of this Legislature to be engaged in debate about the problems that are going on. There will not be a question period, because when you prorogue, you put the calendar aside and you have to start over with a new throne speech. I'm sure what the government has in mind is, "Let's end this particular session and we'll start afresh with a new throne speech in April, when we know better what's happening on the economic front."

My view of this is exactly the opposite in terms of what Dalton McGuinty and this government should be doing. I believe that we should not be just talking—first of all, the finance committee is not even going to deal with any of the real problems. We have real problems with our auto sector. We have real problems with our high-tech sector. In an area which I represent in this Legislature, the city of Kanata in the west part of Ottawa, the high-tech sector is having problems, and we need to deal with that sector. We need to deal with the agricultural sector. We need to deal with a whole number of sectors that are facing a real problem that's coming on.

We should sit together and hear experts and economists and try to act as best we can in a non-partisan way to try to seek logical, reasonable, intelligent resolutions to these problems.

1750

I know last week I was talking to a number of young people who had graduated from school and were looking for a job. One of our local councillors in Ottawa is looking for a new political assistant. I was told on Saturday night, when I was in the town of Almonte, where they were celebrating the 10th anniversary of the township of Mississippi Mills, by one of the people who was there about their daughter applying for this job with a local councillor in the city of Ottawa. I don't know what the job would pay, but it was probably \$30,000 or maybe \$40,000. The councillor had over 1,000 applications for the job—1,000 applications from young people for one job.

I have a relative who runs a property management company which offers property management services right across Canada, and because his particular business is expanding, partially because some of the larger institutions like banks are getting rid of their employees who are involved in that particular matter and saying, "We need somebody else outside to do that for less money," he's in a mode of hiring. He put out an ad for many of the positions that he's looking for, and he is getting thousands and thousands of people applying for those jobs. Jobs are very scarce. In fact, for two relatively senior positions for people who are very skilled, two people who are presently working in the auto sector are willing to come and work for him for 40% less than they are receiving from the auto sector. That's because they know it's inevitable what's going to happen to them, but it also shows perhaps the market value of some of the staff working in the auto sector, what they are being paid, and it may be perhaps part of the inefficiency of those organizations.

Notwithstanding that, we should have some select committees of this Legislature dealing with the real problem. We should be listening to people who come objectively to the table, people who want to help and find real solutions to these real problems. We don't want to hear only from the people who are receiving money that they want more, which is what this committee is going to be all about. We need to receive information from third parties who are not receiving money, who are not necessarily directly benefiting or losing from a sector's particular problem at the time. We want to talk to those people about how we can help to resolve the problem.

Today in this Legislature, there were issues raised about pension liabilities. Do you think that this finance committee, in five days of hearings where they will be hearing probably 12 or 13 submissions a day, is going to be able to come forward to this Legislature with recommendations about how to deal with the shortfall in the pension funds and the liabilities that these pension funds have at the present time? How are we going to assure the retirees from General Motors, where the pension fund is

\$6 billion in the hole, not today but over the future as they go out to pay those pensions? How are we going to deal with that problem? How are we going to make decisions about it? How are we going to protect the people who are on the pensions? And what is fair to rest of the people of Ontario with regard to that issue? We should be talking about those tough issues.

This is a time in the Legislature when we have to get rid of the spin. We have to talk about real facts. We have to talk about hard decisions. We've got to be able, as legislators, to come together and make recommendations as to what those hard decisions might or might not be. It's not going to be fun. Politicians are very reticent to say no to somebody who comes with their hand out. Politicians are very reluctant to say, "Well, you know, you're going to have to compromise your desires with regard to what you're going to get out of this bailout package, or whatever it might be, in order for us to make it work for everybody." But you can only do that as legislators if you have some good facts in front of you, if you have good research, if you have good consultants who are working with you to bring forward recommendations that we can, in fact, use.

Quite frankly, this particular motion and the idea that the finance committee can deal with our present economic crisis in five days is naive and insulting to all of us. It's preposterous. We should be getting together and saying, "Okay, let's set aside a week in January and February as we go forward, or two weeks or three weeks or whatever it is, one for the auto sector, one for the agricultural sector, one for the tourist sector, one for our municipalities and how they're going to cope through all

of this, because their revenues are going to be very difficult to get." They're going to have a lot of defaulting people, property taxpayers, as we go forward. How are they going to deal with that? How are they going to deal with their infrastructure needs when this government has failed to provide ongoing substantial, sustainable funding for our municipalities? Even though they promised about a year and a half ago, and we now know that it's out and it's a joke and nothing happens for two years and it isn't completed for another ten. We need to be serious about this economic crunch and crisis that we're involved in here, now, in our province of Ontario. There are a lot of people suffering now—not nearly as many as are going to suffer in the next oncoming months.

This motion and the attempt to deal with it prior to January 1, the idea that we're giving over to the government the right to just wash its hands on January 1 and say, "Boys, you're not meeting for three months even though our economy is going down the tubes," is absolutely insulting to the members of this Legislature. It's for that reason that we feel so strongly, that we're speaking in this Legislature, that we're speaking against this motion and will vote against this motion, because we believe much more is needed and we need much more time and concentration on this most important issue for the people of Ontario.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The time being almost 6:00 of the clock, I'm declaring this House adjourned. The House will reconvene tomorrow morning, Tuesday, November 25, at 9.

The House adjourned at 1758.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
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lynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
onseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
élinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
erretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
ravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
ampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora—Rainy River	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
ardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
illier, Randy (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington	
orwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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udak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West—Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest—Glanbrook	
czek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges—Markham	
ffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton—Springdale	
nes, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	
ees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
ormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
ilar, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea—Gore—Malton	
winter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
londe, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
al, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
vac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
acLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean—Carleton	
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archese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity—Spadina	
artiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
athews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
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cGuinity, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
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Neely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa—Orléans	
illeur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
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ller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
lloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
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ridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
nro, Julia (PC)	York—Simcoe	
rdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Orazietti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
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of Ontario**

First Session, 39th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

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des débats
(Hansard)**



Tuesday 25 November 2008

Mardi 25 novembre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
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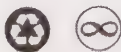
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 25 November 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 25 novembre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a Jewish prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

COUNTERING DISTRACTED DRIVING AND PROMOTING GREEN TRANSPORTATION ACT, 2008 LOI DE 2008 VISANT À COMBATTRE LA CONDUITE INATTENTIVE ET À PROMOUVOIR LES TRANSPORTS ÉCOLOGIQUES

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 20, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 118, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of devices with display screens and hand-held communication and entertainment devices and to amend the Public Vehicles Act with respect to car pool vehicles / Projet de loi 118, Loi modifiant le Code de la route afin d'interdire l'usage d'appareils à écran et d'appareils portatifs de télécommunications et de divertissement et modifiant la Loi sur les véhicules de transport en commun à l'égard des véhicules de covoiturage.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm glad to be here among all of my colleagues in the opposition in order to have a discussion about this bill. I want to say up front—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: There we go. I'm glad my colleagues are showing up in great numbers. This is very good. Thank you very much.

First of all, I want to say up front that I think this bill represents an interesting step forward in trying to deal with the issue of making drivers safer—not only drivers, but quite frankly, anybody who is travelling on our highways or walking down the sidewalk, when it comes to trying to make things safer for people. The bill is trying to deal with how we are able to deal with the distraction that drivers have within the automobile or the truck when they're driving.

I think generally there's support. Most people think it's a bit of a no-brainer, and understand that using your BlackBerry—and by the way, Mr. B., if you can take mine away; I forgot to turn off my telephone. I just

thought of it as I ran into the House. See, I'm describing myself and I'm saying, "Yes, I have a problem, and I'm working on it."

I do want to say that first of all, we all agree with the direction that this legislation is going in. I think we can all agree that when it comes to distractions when you're driving your car or your truck, it's certainly an issue that we need to take seriously in Ontario. But I want to also say that drivers need to take this seriously. We need to understand that driving is not a right but a responsibility. With the responsibility that you're given when you're given your driver's licence comes a certain amount of responsibility on your part to make sure that you are doing what you can to make yourself as safe a driver as possible, by way of your driving habits and your skills, following the rules of the road, but also recognizing that the vehicle you're driving is a lethal weapon. We know that far too often in our province, as across this country and across this world, automobiles are involved in many fatalities, either directly in an automobile accident, or somebody else being struck by an automobile at a speed. You're talking about, basically, a lethal weapon. We need to view our responsibility when it comes to driving from that perspective. We need to be aware of what's happening on the road around us and we cannot be distracted when we drive. This particular bill tries to deal with the use of how we're able to ban cell phones and how we're able to ban other electronic devices within the car or the truck so that we are not distracted from being able to drive.

I want to do a little poll: Who here in this Legislature has never used a cell phone in their automobile? I don't see any hands going up. That's true, because we're all guilty. Let the record show that all of us, myself included, have been known to utilize BlackBerries and other cellular devices within our automobiles or trucks as we're driving from point A to point B.

For my good friend Mr. Gravelle and me, it's a bit of a—we have long distances to drive from one constituency meeting to another. We can drive three, four, five hours just moving from point A to point B, and sometimes—well, always—the use of a cell phone is a very handy thing if you can get cell service on the road that you're driving on, which is a whole other issue for us in northern Ontario. What certainly is true is that this new device has caused greater unsafety on our highways, and I think that's what we're recognizing in this debate.

I will say up front, as all members of this assembly and probably most members of the public who have cell phones or BlackBerries, I've used my cell phone while

driving. I thought at first, "Oh, I'm in control. I'm a great driver; I haven't had a speeding ticket." We were just talking about that the other night. I bet since I got to this place, at least 18 or 19 years—I did get caught once for something else, but it had to do with throwing a Fudg-sicle out my window, but that's a whole other story. We'll tell that one a little bit later. It was a very hot day somewhere on Highway 11 and it wasn't the smartest thing to do. I learned my lessons and I've reformed on that one as well. But I would say that we've all used them and we all thought we're invincible, that we're great drivers, that we're great at what we do and we can multi-task and we can certainly drive a car. We can certainly talk to somebody on a cell phone and deal with all the other myriad of things that are going on around us as we drive our vehicles. Well, I think we're starting to recognize that's not the case.

I'll just give you one very short example of what happened to me that pretty well put me off using my cell phone in my car, unless I'm using one of those devices that you plug in your ear and you've got a little mic on it. I was driving from home about two or three years ago. I was going off to a constituency event, and as I drive down Cameron Street and turn right down Middleton and turn right on Cameron, I get to the four-way stop. When I got to the four-way stop on the corner of Commercial and Cameron, I fully stopped the vehicle. I looked and I saw there was another car coming. I allowed the other car to proceed. The phone rang and I picked up the phone and I said, "Hello, how's it going? Gilles here." When I knew that the car had gone by I decided to start advancing and a woman was walking across the road and had to slap the top of my car. I didn't see her coming from the left-hand side, and why? Because I turned to the right to grab the cell phone in order to say "Hi," and I was still concentrating on the car that I saw to my right. I didn't see her to the left because she was coming up sort of parallel to a fence so I didn't see her.

So the point I make: Man, it happens just like that. You think it can't happen to you? I was lucky that that woman had the good sense to realize that I wasn't looking her in the eye and she slapped my car when she noticed what I was doing. It has taught me something when I'm a pedestrian or when I'm driving a motorbike or I'm riding a bicycle. I always look for eye contact whenever I'm looking at a driver. If I'm crossing a street, I don't care if I'm on a green light; I look over to see that the person actually acknowledges me in their eyes before I cross, because far too often I've seen people blow stop signs and red lights because they're not paying attention. They may be distracted by tuning in the radio or putting a new CD in the CD stack, they might be talking on their cell phone, or maybe they're just distracted and thinking about something else and they're not paying attention to what they're doing.

So it comes to the point that I made originally, which is, we need to make sure that, as drivers, we take our responsibility. I think if there's one thing that we should be trying to do in this province, it's to say we need to engage in a campaign in this province where we basically

try to engage drivers, young and old, to understand that driving is not a right but a responsibility, and with that responsibility comes your requirement to make sure that you drive safely, that you're better trained, your car is in good condition and all of the things that need to be done to make it safer.

Let's get on to the subject of the bill; well, this is the subject of the bill, but the actual details of it. The government in this bill is saying that they want to ban the utilization of all electronic devices that are hand-held. They would allow you to have a dash-mounted GPS unit for navigation. You'd be allowed to have a radio or a tape deck player, satellite radio, devices that are normally utilized in cars, except of course for TV monitors to watch a movie as you're going down the highway. But they will allow certain devices as long as they're mounted on the dash of your vehicle. I think that is a fair compromise.

0910

But I want to caution that these devices as well can be pretty distracting. Trying to navigate a GPS when you're going to a strange location and you don't know where you're at takes—I wouldn't even argue it takes a special skill; I think it takes a bit of planning before you get in the car. You should be looking at where you're going. You should be, in your mind, looking at the GPS before you go, "What are the exits that I have to take so that I know how to get there?" so that you're not trying to read the GPS and set the settings as you're going off the off ramp going into London or you're turning off one street onto another, because those dash-mounted devices can be just as distracting as my picking up a cellphone and chatting.

I guess this is the point that I want to make: We can't legislate our way out of making drivers responsible. I think we can all agree on that. That's one of the things that we need to look at when it comes to an overall transportation or driver training policy and making drivers safer on our roads.

Dash-mounted devices will be allowed, but I just want to caution that these things are still a problem. I'm not arguing for a second that we don't make them legal, but I'm just saying we need to recognize they're an issue as well. Something as simple as a radio, you're turning off one street to the other, and you don't like the song, and you're trying to search for a song on another station. That can distract you just as much. I think we need to recognize that we have a responsibility as drivers.

As for hand-held devices, banning a hand-held cellphone, absolutely; banning other devices such as MP3 players and stuff, maybe to a degree. But certainly we need to move to not allowing people to utilize cellphones and other devices such as BlackBerries as they're trying to text their way into the next meeting while driving. And how many times have we seen that? It's problematic, quite frankly, so banning those particular devices is not a bad idea.

Once we get to committee, I think we need to look at, is this bill doing this in a practical way? Are there other devices that maybe should be exempted? I'll speak to that

a little bit later in regard to the courier industry and those people who transport packages from one point to another, because they have special devices that may be caught up in this legislation. I think we need to look at that so we don't end up crippling an industry and making them much less green and less efficient when it comes to the work that they do.

But certainly, on the principle of banning a BlackBerry or a telephone, that makes a lot of sense. I'm just amazed, and we all see it as we drive. I was coming up Bay Street this morning to come to this debate. As I'm driving up, in the car beside me the guy was driving, and he had one elbow on the wheel and was texting something on his BlackBerry. Come on. Give me a break. People need to understand that we have responsibilities as drivers.

The other one we all see is somebody driving down the road and they're eating their hamburger or chicken or whatever. It is not a restaurant; it's a car. I can tell you, I am of Latino decent, as you well know, and we franco-phones and other Latinos enjoy our food, but we need an ambience to eat in. A car? Monsieur, c'est donc—I don't know. What are we thinking of? I think eating is an activity that should be conducted in a more civilized environment.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Show of hands.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Show of hands. My Latino friends are putting their hands up with me. Eating, I think, is something that requires a much better ambience than a car.

I guess the point I make is that if we are making BlackBerrys illegal to use, should the McDonald's hamburger be included? I just raise that. I'm not pointing at McDonald's. I'm just making the point. How often have we seen people driving down our highways and roads eating a McDonald's hamburger or Harvey's burger or Kentucky Fried Chicken, and all of a sudden the pickle fell on their shirt, and they're trying to take off the pickle and the mustard and everything else?

Quite frankly, aside from bad culinary habits, I've got to say, my Lord, maybe it's a question of making sure we have legislation that allows police officers, when they see this kind of thing, to say, "Hey, listen, a hamburger is just as distracting and probably more distracting than a phone call coming in," especially if it's a bad burger. I just raise the point.

The other example we see is people shaving or we see people doing their hair as they're driving down the highways—how often have you seen it?—or doing their nails.

Mr. Dave Levac: And other things.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And other things. Okay, I'm not going to go there. But the point I make is that there are all kinds of other distractions going on in the car. I've seen it I don't know how many times, when I'm driving down the 401, or going up the 400 or Highway 11, and you're in a lane next to somebody on a two- or three-lane highway, or you're passing somebody and you see the person shaving as they're driving down the road. I've seen that more than once, I would say, in the last year, or

somebody trying to do their hair. The point that I'm trying to make is, yes, ban cellular devices and BlackBerrys and other such hand-held devices in the car, but I think we need to really educate drivers on the responsibility of driving, and making sure that they're not doing other things that are probably as dangerous as using a BlackBerry. I think those are some of the conversations that we need to have at committee.

Now, I want to say up front, and I have been saying this for a while around transportation issues: You can't legislate everything away. I think the parliamentary assistant and the ministers who are here will agree that, yes, we have a legislative responsibility towards trying to make our roads safer, and of course Legislatures have that responsibility and should take it seriously. But I really want to make the point that you can draft all the legislation you want, but I think there are two factors we need to look to see if it's effective. One is, is there a fear of being caught? If I don't think there are police officers out on our highways and roads who are going to be monitoring me and I can get away with whatever—talking on a cellphone, eating a hamburger, doing my hair, speeding or improper passing or whatever it is—I'm probably going to continue doing it. I think one of the things that we need to do is to instill within the public, by having adequate policing on our highways, and maybe the use of other electronic devices, a real sense that, "Hey, if you do this kind of stuff and we see you, we're going to do something about it." That is the biggest correction, I think, to behaviour that we can do in order to make our roads safer.

I remember back in the early 1990s, our government introduced photo radar. Now, it was a huge thing at the time, where the opposition parties, both the Liberals and Tories, were in opposition to photo radar. I was too, initially, to tell you the honest-to-God's truth. I thought, "Oh, my God. Politically, this is an unpopular thing. We're going to take more flak than we need." We were a government in the middle of a recession, and why were we asking for more trouble? That's kind of how I viewed it. But I do have to say, after photo radar came in you noticed a huge difference on the 400-series highways. I remember driving on the 401 or up the 400 from point A to point B, and speeds were actually much more moderate. Because speeds had come down overall, we were actually getting from point A to point B faster, because there was less stopping and going. In other words, you didn't have people speeding at 10, 15, 20 over the limit on the 401, and all of a sudden having to touch their brakes because somebody did something that caused a distraction on the highway or caused an accident. Therefore, the speeds were slower, there were fewer accidents and incidents, and in fact traffic moved a lot easier. I really noticed it.

I remember when photo radar was first instituted, I jumped into my rented vehicle, I think at Toronto Pearson airport. I had been used to the fact that when you come off the ramp onto the 427, you had to be up to a certain speed in order to just go with the traffic. Lord, I

had to slam on my brakes when I got onto the 427. I remember, "Oh, jeez, look at this, everybody's going slower." I think it actually did improve traffic flow to an extent.

Am I saying we should reinstitute photo radar? No, that's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that we should be looking at technologies that are available to us in order to properly monitor our roads so that we can give police officers the tools they need and the staffing levels they need in order to be able to assist drivers in making sure they take their responsibilities and drive safely.

One of the other discussions we should have in committee is we should be inviting our police officers forward to speak to us. I think a lot of them will speak in favour of the bill, to be blunt. But what other things can we do? Are there things that we can do to assist them to make their jobs easier? Are there things that we can do as a Legislature that allow the public to understand that there is a consequence to their bad actions when it comes to driving, and that if they do step out of the law, either by way of speeding or other violations, or the use of hand-held devices, in fact there will be a real possibility of being caught—and I think that feeling of being caught, in the end, will be the biggest deterrent to people not doing bad habits when it comes to driving. I want to put that on the record.

Now, here are some of the concerns that I've heard from people who have talked to me out there in regard to this legislation. The way the legislation is written now—and it'll be interesting to see how this unfolds. I'm not pretending that I'm saying for sure it's this way, but this is something I think we need to look at. There are some devices that are utilized by different types of businesses that are hand-held and are part of them doing their jobs. For example, the people in the courier industry, the Canada Post people, the Purolator people and other people who deliver parcels from point A to point B use a hand-held tablet. The hand-held tablet dispatches the person where to make pickups and where to make deliveries to. One of the questions I've heard from people who have come to me is, will those hand-held tablets be banned from use? I see the parliamentary assistant saying no, and I think that's good. We need to clarify that and make sure that is the case, because the argument is, if I'm picking up parcels and I'm running from the north side of Yonge Street, let's say at the 401, and driving down to Bloor Street, they dispatch the person in real time to pick up parcels along the way, and they need to be able to look at their hand-held device and say, "Whoops, one just came in three blocks down. I've got to stop and pick up a parcel." From an environmental point of view, this is a good thing. Why? Because it means far fewer people travelling up and down the road and crossing each other in order to pick up parcels; that is harder on our environment. From an environmental point of view, efficiency in how we utilize and dispatch couriers and taxis and other such vehicles is important. We don't need them running around the city, going back to get information about where they're supposed to pick up a parcel when they

just drove by that door in the first place. There are people who have approached me, who have said they're concerned that we need to very much clarify in legislation that those hand-held devices, which are the tablets that do the dispatching, need to be allowed.

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Now, I think we can talk about how you use those things. I know, from talking to the people that I spoke to on the weekend back home and some of the people who were here to lobby me—I think it was last week—they were saying that if you look at the safety statistics for the courier industry, you'll see they're fairly safe, as compared to others, because they don't drive at high speeds, they're generally just flowing with traffic, and for the most part they don't pick up the tablet and input while they're driving, as some other people do with Black-Berries. It's something you do when you're at the red light: You look down and say, "Okay, I have a pickup at 2047 Yonge Street; I'll stop on the way by"—that type of thing, and you press the button to acknowledge.

The other one is an issue that was raised by a couple of taxi drivers that I had a chance to talk to as I was driving around Toronto to different events. A few of them recognized me; when you've been in this Legislature for some 19 years, you get to be known by some, and I've done work with the taxi industry over the years, so some of those people know me. One of them said, "Hey, Mr. Bisson, our two-way radio and dispatching system"—the dispatching system is fixed to the car; it's a dash mount—"will it be excluded?" I said, "As far as I know, the answer is yes, it shall be excluded." He said, "What about the two-way radios? Is a two-way radio a hand-held device that will be prohibited?" I said, "I don't think so. I would imagine we're not going to be as silly as to say, 'You can't use a two-way radio when working in a cab.'" But it was a question that was raised, and I think we need to go to committee and look at that and make sure that is the case. Because you don't want to have taxi drivers—all of us have large taxi industries within our constituencies, and that is how they are dispatched. Somebody makes a call to the cab stand, the dispatcher calls over the radio and says, "Car 44, such-and-such an address," and the person rogers that on the radio. I don't think it'll be excluded; I don't think it'll be banned, the way I read the legislation. But you know, there are those people out there who have that concern. So I think we need to look at that as well. We need to make sure that we're not banning that.

The other one, and I thought it was an interesting one—and I hadn't thought about this—is these push-to-talk radio cellphones. A lot of people are starting to use those now as part of doing business. There is a contractor that I know back home who uses that on job sites in order to communicate between the superintendent and the foreman and other key people on the job site. These things have quite a range, because they piggyback on the cellular network, and rather than dialling the phone number and having somebody answer a cellphone at the other end, they're using push-to-talk technology, which is

basically a cellphone with a radio in it. So the question becomes, is the push-to-talk technology going to be banned? That's a good question. I think it might be, the way I read the legislation. I see the parliamentary assistant sort of nodding that probably it will be. But we need to have a discussion about that, because I think that is a different device. If I pick up a device that happens to be a cellphone as well as a two-way radio, it's a bit of a different thing. If it's one of those push-to-talks where you're doing one of these—it's not an earpiece; it's basically, "Yeah, I'm coming on the construction site, I'll be there in an hour and tell so and so to do whatever." Maybe there are ways that we need to look at how we approach that push-to-talk technology so that we're not biting off our nose to spite our face. So I think it was one of the other things that was raised that we need to look at.

All in all, as I said, it is a bill that I think most of us in this Legislature can support and it's one that certainly needs to go to committee. We need to have some time in committee in order to deal with this in a way that we're able to look at where the pitfalls are in this legislation? What are the strengths, how can we make them better. How can we assist police officers in order to make sure they can enforce this as they can enforce anything else? Are there any other technologies that we can use out there to give police officers the tools that they need in order to better do their jobs in monitoring our streets and highways across this province? I think those are some of the things that we're going to have to take a look at when it comes to committee.

With that, I've made my contributions. I think sometimes you don't need to speak the full amount of time in order to make your point because, quite frankly, enough has been said. With that, I look forward to questions and comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I thoroughly enjoyed the remarks this morning from my colleague from Timmins—James Bay. He certainly brings unique insight in his riding in northern Ontario, the city of Timmins. He's on the road frequently, probably more frequently than some of us who have ridings in southern and east central Ontario. So he spends a lot of time on the roads and certainly has a history in this House of being a strong advocate over his 18-plus years for road safety and, certainly his work in the, I believe, three private member's bills from my friend for the riding of Durham, Mr. O'Toole.

Here we have Bill 118, that has been introduced by the Minister of Transportation, our good friend Mr. Bradley, looking at ways to improve safety on our highways, which I think is a non-partisan issue. Everybody on all sides of the House certainly wants to bring in measures and have them enforced and improve safety on our roads.

The member from Timmins—James Bay makes an interesting point about the courier business. I know in my case, at my constituency office in Peterborough, there's a Purolator person that comes everyday. He has been doing our route, now for five-plus years. I'm always struck

watching him and how carefully he drives in the downtown area of Peterborough, obviously making numerous stops. The member makes a good point, because often when they're out and about they get a call on the device that they use, really, to make their jobs more efficient. If they're in an area where they can make two or three stops along the way with the valuable information they receive through that digital device, that helps them do their job, by the hour, frankly. When this bill goes to committee, it will be the opportunity to look at things like that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to add some comments to the speech from the member from Timmins—James Bay talking about the cell phone ban bill. He was very forthright in talking about his own experiences driving and using his BlackBerry or cell phone. I think anybody who's honest who has used a cell phone in a car will remember instances when they weren't putting all of their full attention to the activity of actually driving the car.

So I support this bill; I certainly have questions as well to do with it. I support being able to still use a hands-free device in the car. I know one of the vehicles that our family owns has a UConnect device in the car that allows you to have two hands on the wheel and not be fiddling with small numbers on a BlackBerry or whatever, as we shouldn't be doing.

This bill has been brought forward by the government. I don't know how many times the member from Durham, as has been mentioned, brought a private member's bill before this Legislature proposing similar legislation. I have had questions from constituents to do with the effect on GPS devices in cars. I know that GPS devices are becoming more and more popular and useful, I would say, to people driving their cars; to find their destinations, to not be fumbling with a map. I would hope, and I believe that in this legislation, a GPS device is still allowed in a car as long as it's affixed to the windshield or a permanent part of the car. I hope that is the case, because I believe that the GPS devices are very useful. Certainly, in the job of being an MPP and getting to an appointment on time where you're not sure where it is, it is very, very useful.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I really enjoyed the comments by the member from Timmins—James Bay on this issue. I think what he struck was something very important, namely, a kind of a balance, and balance, in most of our bills, is very important. On the one hand, I certainly agree: Anyone who's driving a car can see what's sometimes called a horror show on the road. Just the other day, I saw a woman doing her lipstick in the mirror while she was driving. Obviously, this sometimes happens at stop signs and intersections. I was driving with my own mother one day, when she was eating, not a hamburger, when she was eating Chinese—good thing she didn't

have any chopsticks with her. But certainly, I said, "You should really pay more attention to how you're driving."

But it's easy to do that, especially when you are taking a long-distance road. It's easy for the member from Timmins—James Bay, who spends so many hours on the road, to get into Latino foods; it's easy for him to get into using the cellphone and so on, whereas city driving is probably more—not that people are not as often getting into those bad habits, but especially for country driving and long-distance driving, it's even more important.

The point is that government has to find a balance. While we can't legislate everything, every item, from the radio to shaving in the car, certainly what's important today in this bill, which I agree with, is to find a balance, and I think that's been done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's always a pleasure to respond to the member from Timmins—James Bay, who has had a very large role in this bill, and I think the minister acknowledged that in his opening remarks on Bill 118. I would also say the reason I'm standing here is that I'd certainly like to think I've had some role in bringing this kind of issue to the floor.

Applause.

Mr. John O'Toole: I appreciate the applause from the other members. All members of all sides like to make a contribution to making Ontario a better place to live; in fact, our roads safer.

I've listened carefully to his comments, and the question becomes not one that this bill isn't needed; I think it is. In fact, much of the research that I've heard from experts in the area, whether the CAA or the Insurance Bureau of Canada or the Ontario Police Association and others, is that this is a new tool and an important tool to make our roads safer. I think it took 10 years since I first introduced the bill.

Now, the bill was brought to my attention, in all due respect, by a constituent who observed someone going through a red light, and they said that—I didn't get it at first—the person was completely unaware that they'd gone through the light because they were on a cellphone. I started to look at other jurisdictions and happened to mention it to my daughter, who at that time was living in Australia, and she said, "Well, in Australia, it's banned." That's really where the idea came from. So it's wonderful to see this thing before us, and I thank the minister for bringing it forward.

I would have more to say on this bill, depending when I get the opportunity to speak, but it's almost like an anniversary for me because it's almost 10 years. By the time this is law, June 2009, it will be 10 years. So from concept to implementation is a long wait, and I'm glad to still be in the Legislature to see it happen, to give birth to the child.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Response by the member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: To the member from Durham, happy anniversary, I guess, would be the comment.

I think we recognize that everybody played a role in this, especially the member from Durham, who first championed this some 10 years ago. I know a number of other members have raised this, either by way of questions in the House or letters to the ministers or bills themselves. I think it's one of those ways that private members' bills serve this Legislature well. A member finds something, as the member from Durham points out, basically tries to do something about it and eventually—the bill may not make it past second reading. Normally, bills will get to second reading. Very few private members' bills make it beyond that, but eventually governments say, "Hey, not a bad idea. Let's pick up the ball and run with it." Is that partisan? You can argue on both sides of it. I would prefer that governments would give private members the ability to actually pass their bills, if they're good bills, and the bills should stand the test of the subject matter that they're trying to deal with. Governments, I would argue, of all stripes should allow private members' hour to work more effectively. But, in this case, it's moving forward. So to the member from Durham I say congratulations.

I do want to echo again the point that I was trying to make. One is, you can't legislate everything away. At one point, drivers need to take the responsibility. We need to understand that getting a driver's licence is not a right in this province, it's a responsibility, and people need to look at it that way. Two, if we're going to ban cellphones, what about the hamburger? I made the point. What about the razor? What about other distractions in the car? I think we need to look at that when it comes to committee.

I guess the other point is that we really need to give police officers the tools they need to properly enforce these laws. You can write all the laws you want, but in the end, if there is no fear of being caught, people are going to continue doing what they're doing. Only when there is a fear of being caught do people start to change their habits. So I'm not convinced that we're doing what needs to happen at the police staffing level and the resources we need to give them to make that happen, but we'll see when we get to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate? I recognize the member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a procedural comment, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make sure that we stand down our lead. I would seek unanimous consent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Durham is seeking unanimous consent to allow the official opposition to stand down its leadoff speech.

Mr. Mike Colle: No.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): There is no consent? There is no consent.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Has it already been—

Mr. Norm Miller: Excuse me. On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I think the member probably didn't realize we've already had and received unanimous consent to stand down the lead.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I just need to consult with the table for one moment.

I recognize the member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and it's a pleasure again to speak on Bill 118, on second reading.

This is a bill that was introduced by the honourable James Bradley on October 28, 2008. It's really a two-part bill. It's addressing the issue of hand-held technology, which could be defined in regulation, as well as the idea of redefining the Public Vehicles Act dealing with carpooling which the member from Timmins-James Bay had a private member's bill on. So in the case here, we almost have a consensus issue with respect to the legislative initiative here. There may be some fine-tuning and some process things that need to be addressed, and I'm confident, in fact, I would put it on the record, that there should be some public hearings on it, because there are a number of stakeholders and some issues on both sides.

I would be supportive, in the first instance, of the issue of carpooling, given the current economy, the environment and the need to address issues to encourage people to have more than one passenger. The HOV lanes are a good example of supporting an initiative of more than one passenger or one person in a car. I think this goes a long way to addressing and encouraging, and in fact incentivizing, the carpooling initiative in the bill.

On that issue, I would like to suggest that there's an ability of the owner-operator of the vehicle to charge a reasonable fare. A reasonable fare was the issue; if it's just a friend that are you giving a lift or a convenience to, it's one thing, but when there's money exchanged, that's another issue. It's competition with couriers, other taxis, limousine services and other providers and a whole different type of licensing. In fact, there are insurance issues themselves.

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I would like to think that the government could really be even more creative in this area. Specifically, without being critical, I'm just suggesting the opposition has positive ideas. I see the parliamentary assistant is here listening, so that's good. I think there could be encouragement by the government to facilitate carpooling to destinations. In fact, carpooling isn't just a car; perhaps the size of the vehicle could be addressed as well.

By that I mean that when I was the transportation critic, I talked to the Ontario bus operators and they said to me that now they could cluster services—and I will take some time to define it briefly. The impression I got from their presentation to me was that they could provide a service by a luxury coach—it could be a large van; it could be a large bus for that matter—into Toronto, for instance to the financial community on Bay Street, to the legal community of Bay Street or to a ministry office. They could collect the people at a satellite site; it could be from Barrie, it could be from Kitchener-Waterloo or it

could be from Durham region. You could have a depot where the people met and parked and then bring them into Toronto. However, the problem was, as they understood it, because of licensing and other agreements, they could not bring any kind of courier-type service into Toronto because of the TTC. So there are existing rules that need to be addressed. I think the province should take a role in facilitating smaller footprints in moving people in public transit modes, of which this bill talks a bit.

I won't go on except to say that we need to be more creative for reasons of the economy, the environment and the convenience of individual people, as opposed to other large organizations that are intransigent. They don't want to change from the big, 50-passenger bus problem.

Now, in my riding of Durham, what I see is the wish from the municipal leadership, the region of Durham primarily, to encourage buses in our communities. My communities would include three major communities: The municipality of Uxbridge, the township of Scugog and the municipality of Clarington. Within each of those three communities—those are the major centres, Uxbridge, Port Parry and Bowmanville primarily—there are smaller towns. The connectivity between those smaller towns: A good example might be that where some people are on the 401 east of Oshawa, there you would find the municipality of Clarington, but in it you would have subordinate towns, smaller communities, like Courtice, Bowmanville, Newcastle and Newtonville. These are all communities along the 401, going from west to east. They could be easily connected by bus, and in fact, they are being connected by bus. Durham Region Transit is making every effort to connect those communities. The problem is there's really not a lot of money in it because, often in the rural communities, there are retired people or people who aren't necessarily going to major urban centres. I think—just to be brief on this part; I don't want to spend all the time on this part—they could listen to the people and move a little bit forward and they should have smaller buses, because these big buses are probably about \$250,000 to \$300,000. It costs about \$50,000 a year for the person driving it and there's nobody in the buses. I've ridden on the bus. Three different times I've ridden on the buses and, I say that on the public record here, no one got on or off the bus; it was just the driver and myself. Now, I didn't explain that I was looking at this. We need the service and the reliability and predictability of the service. We saw yesterday the TTC's \$60 million to reduce the wait time on their complete route. So I think on that section of the bill, they could probably listen to public input and even go a little bit further to encourage this whole idea of carpooling and moving people in a broader or bigger footprint.

The other really important part, and I don't want to go on too long on it because I may get to speak at another time, I guess—I'm not sure, but certainly during public hearings. I want to give a bit of a playback, a refresher course on the genesis of the idea in Ontario. In 1999, almost 10 years ago, I introduced a bill. The first bill I

introduced was Bill 102, and of course, legislation has three steps—really, primarily four steps, but three steps in the formal sense. First the bill is introduced and you get to say a few things on the record. Second reading, like this bill that we are dealing with, Bill 118, is when it's actually debated in the Legislature. Normally, that's the case. Often bills can be sent out, if it's a government bill, to stakeholders, in fact, even after first reading. The purpose of first reading is, the bill is printed and then it's sent out to the stakeholders who want to comment on it. The author of the bill—in most cases, it's a ministry that authors the bill; you hear input and you revise the draft and you introduce it in second reading of a bill. And you could amend it, technically.

Now, at second reading, which we are involved in here, there's a discussion and some points are raised. Obviously, people keep notes—then it could be referred to a committee. That committee would attempt to draft the bill and revise or amend the legislation. Then it would come back for third reading as an amended bill. That's the three steps. But that does not become law until the regulations are often in force, and these are actually the will of the bill. In fact, if you look at this Bill 118 that we're debating, in the very last part of the bill—it's not a very large bill—it says, "This act comes into force on a day to be named by proclamation of the Lieutenant Governor." In other words, there's no assurance that this bill will be introduced just when it's passed third reading. They will go through a series of implementation issues on how and where the resources should be; should there be money for the police to enforce this? Should there be an education component for rolling it out? We're not sure exactly—in fact, I know right now that there is a bill that was passed in 2002 that still is not proclaimed. There are many bills that never really become law. So I don't want this to die on the order paper. I think it's important to implement it in such a way that it's, first, enforceable, and makes our roads safer—the real intent of the bill.

The next time I introduced the bill, we prorogued the House. That means that all legislation was removed from the order paper and we had a throne speech and started a whole new sort of agenda. In 2001, I introduced Bill 49. Each time I introduced the bill I tried to modify it, from comments from the public and the stakeholders. Those stakeholders would be the Insurance Bureau of Canada, the Canadian Automobile Association, the safety league, the Ontario Medical Association, the OPP; I'd spoken to the chiefs of police and the police associations. The wireless association were also quite interested at that time. I think they were probably least accepting of this idea to prohibit or limit the amount of use of cellphones while driving. But there were a couple of things that I said to them. I said, "Why don't you go into this bluetooth technology, so it's hands-free?"

I have my little device with me here. In fact, this is the bluetooth. It's wireless. It's a demonstration, Mr Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I appreciate that, but I have to caution the member that he is not

allowed to use props like that, even though he wants to use those props to illustrate his points during this debate.

I return to the member from Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm just so enthusiastic about this discussion that I would say I think the bluetooth technology is here to stay. I think that even the new gadgets we have, the BlackBerries which we are not allowed to use in here, are all bluetooth-compatible. In other words, what I'm saying here is that I encourage the industry to advance their use, eliminating the physical distraction as much as possible. Now this is important. This is exactly what the minister is doing here. He's saying you cannot have a hand-held device, whether it is a DVD or an iPod or fiddling with some gadget as opposed to driving and operating the motor vehicle safely. That's the whole point of this bill, and it's so important in that respect.

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I've got about four points that should be made because of input I've received, and thanks to all of the stakeholders. I was on programs with Dr. Redelmeier, who started the intellectual academic debate on the risk. He said you're four times more likely to be involved in an accident if you're using technology. There's scientific evidence here that I listened to, and I think the ministry and ministry staff did as well. There are four things that I want to see in the bill, so I will be moving amendments on the bill—with due respect, in co-operation with the minister; we're interested in improving it and making it better—from the input that I've received over the last several years.

First of all, education: When you make a change in what's expected of driver behaviour, education is extremely important, to educate the public about the change and how to change. You change behaviour by education or demonstration. That would include, I believe, the broader issue of the driver education program itself.

There should be a whole module on distracted driving. Distracted driving is not just cellphones. A cellphone is just a piece of equipment that is multi-functional. A cellphone today is not the same as a cellphone 10 years ago. The cellphone today is basically a telephone, a camera, a recording device, GPS; it has the functionality of a computer, you can text message, you can surf the Internet, and in the future you will do more.

It is the young people, the pages here—good to see these young people here—it's really more about you. There are two bills here: Bill 118 is one, and the other affects your own graduated licensing system. We'll talk about that at another time.

But I cannot stress that education component enough. I would also say I have seen a demonstration by the Insurance Bureau of Canada, which is a simulator to demonstrate to drivers, experienced or new—and this isn't all age-contingent. I think young people are more adaptable to the technology than some of the more advanced people like myself, that technically you're used to a lot of those multi-tasking things in life, or at least you're going to have to be. Now, I'm saying the education is very important. I don't want to go on more than

that, and I think I'll be insisting that they examine or address the whole driver education thing and in fact consult with the Ontario Safety League.

The reason I say that is, one of the penalties for breaking this law should be a requirement to take a driver education course, an updated, modern version of it to say the rules of the road have changed—the habits of the roads have changed. Some people coming into Toronto would not know anything about an HOV, high-occupancy vehicle, lane. Not to be critical; they're just not in large cities all the time unless they're going to the CNE or to the opera or something. I'm not sure they'd be going to the opera, but that's another discussion.

The other part, too, is to modify the accident investigation report. It's very important, and I'll tell you why. When Dr. Redelmeier and others did studies, there were experts who disputed the studies they did. They did a statistical analysis of accidents and the persons involved and their cellphone usage. They did a crossover study which said the more you use technology, the more probable it was you could be back in an accident. People disputed those statistics and the methodology.

What I've suggested, working with Dr. Redelmeier and others, Cam Woolley, who was an OPP commentator, an interesting fellow—the accident investigation report today is an actual form, and on that form, they're required to account in an accident, "Were seatbelts being worn?" There is a box; they have to check that off. There's also a portion, "Did alcohol play a role?" Comment on that. They're mandatory boxes. I'm suggesting there be another, "Was technology a contributing role?"

Why do I say that? Well, I want to bring this down to a practical thing.

A tragedy occurred during the time when I had introduced the bill, and I attended an inquest into the accident. An inquest was held into the death of Richard Schewe, who was 31, of Ajax, Ontario, and his two-year-old daughter, Mikaela. They were crossing a railway crossing on May 7, 2001. Mr. Schewe was talking on his cellphone when he drove through a flashing light at a level crossing into the path of a train and both he and his daughter were killed. This was a tragic incident directly related, in the inquest, to the use of a cellphone. He was on the phone and passing it to his young child, who was saying goodbye to the mother. Can you imagine the tragedy? I think it just superimposed on me the importance of this legislation. It made it real to me when I saw the impact on the family.

If we could save one person's life by educating them to not do things that they shouldn't do when it isn't safe to do them, we would be making a contribution to Ontario.

That inquest was an event that told me that this accident investigation report is important, because two years from now, like in the case of seat belts—we know there's a relationship with saving lives, and I think we do lots of things here that are less important than that. I would say that that's what motivates me and that's why I want that second change in the bill.

The third one is the issues around enforcement. How do you enforce this bill in a practical way? At night, with tinted windows in the car, if somebody is using a cellphone or some other hand-held device like their GPS to change their destination, it's difficult to enforce. They said the same thing about seat belts many years ago. I think there need to be educational blitzes. Don't start with writing the ticket. That's not the right way. Don't use the club; use the pencil to educate people.

The last one is setting up a framework of regulations that allows the changing and adaptation of the penalties, the demerit points and the fines and whether or not they have to take a course, as well as the devices themselves.

As I said to you before, I worked in the technology business for about 10 years. The changes are profound. In fact, all vehicle manufacturers today, like Ford, Mercedes, General Motors, have a service provider; some use Microsoft, others use other service providers. These service providers—even satellite radio—are showing you the future. There are going to be more distractions, not less. In fact, you'll see electronic billboards on the Gardiner Expressway. These are distractions.

I think we need to make sure that the people operating a vehicle know, first, that it is a privilege to drive, not a right; and that the fundamental thing—it's as simple as this—is to keep your eyes on the road, your hands on the wheel and your mind on the job. Drive safely.

This bill makes a great contribution to making our roads safer. I will be supporting the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I had a chance a little while ago to speak to this bill, and I again say to the member from Durham, job well done on raising and bringing to this Legislature the issue of banning cellphones.

In my speech, I didn't talk about the section of the bill that deals with carpooling. That's something that I've been after going back six or seven years, by way of motions to this House and questions to ministers within both the Conservative and Liberal governments. I was glad to see that Mr. Bradley, in this bill, acknowledged that there's an issue to be dealt with when it comes to making the carpooling that goes on in this province legal—agencies such as Allo Stop, which is one that we used to deal with out of Montreal, and PickupPal, which is the one that we know here in Ontario.

I think we recognize that there is not good intercity bus or rail service everywhere. Far too often, those schedules are not conducive to the needs that the rider has. There may be other reasons why somebody just doesn't want to get on a bus or a train. They might have a phobia about driving with a lot of people on a train or a bus. It could be that the schedule doesn't work, or there might be medical reasons. So PickupPal, Allo Stop, those types of organizations that organize carpooling, provide a service to Ontario that we need to recognize. That it was illegal, I think, was wrong; that it is being made legal, I think, is right. We need to take a look in committee to make sure that we're getting to where we've got to go.

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It's also a question of the environment. If we're serious about trying to green our environment, one of the big things is the greenhouse gas emissions, and one of the biggest causes of greenhouse gas, aside from coal-fired plants, is automobiles. We should be doing all that we can to move people out of cars into carpooling, move people off cars into intercity bus or rail, finding ways to move people in larger numbers with fewer vehicles in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. That's one of the reasons I was a champion of this particular issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I was sharing, in my thoughts, when the member from Durham was speaking about the trials and tribulations of private members' bills, and I think he gives good advice to the new members. It took him 10 years to get this into law. I see some new members stand up, they present a private member's bill and they say, "Oh, the government's not going to pass my bill. It's a great bill." I think it's really incumbent upon all of us, if we've got a good idea, to stick with it. He stuck with it, and now we've seen the law.

I've had similar experiences myself with red light camera legislation. The member would remember that, when I introduced the bill to install red light cameras at dangerous intersections. The government at the time of Mike Harris yelled and screamed, "We can't have red light cameras at intersections like photo radar at every corner." Anyway, we now have red light cameras at dangerous intersections.

This is how this place works, but it takes time, it takes dialogue back and forth. This bill is now before us and I think it's obviously of great benefit.

About carpooling, I should mention that I think the best thing they've done with carpooling lately is that you'll see a lot of the carpooling lanes, the diamond lanes—now two drivers make you eligible. Originally, a lot of the carpooling lanes required three. It's literally impossible to get three Canadians in one car, it seems. As you know, if you stop at any major intersection, you'll see that 90% of the cars in Toronto have one occupant in them—one car, one occupant. That's all you can get in a car.

The other thing is, we're doing something about cell-phones in cars. The paradox of this is, we're worried about them having cellphones, yet you can basically drive around the city with guns in your cars and the police can't really do anything about it. If you want to talk about distractions, why not take the guns out of the cars? I know a lot of the police would like that law to be in place—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to add my comments and congratulations to the member for Durham for his tenacity in sticking with his good idea on banning cell-phones and hand-held devices. It's an example of better late than never.

The government brought this bill in and, as the member said, our caucus is going to support it. I hope that when we do consultations on these types of bills, as opposed to Bill 126—they haven't had any consultation on that. I understand that there are 105,000 hits on Facebook from young drivers and their parents who are opposed to that bill because there hasn't been consultation on that. When the member from Eglinton—Lawrence talked about seeing at intersections one driver only in a car, if that bill passes, you'll see a lot more single passengers. They will be teenagers and they will be alone.

Again, I'd like to pay tribute to the member for Durham for sticking with that. It was a good idea. We have seen many tragic circumstances from people talking on cellphones, being inattentive. I've tried to change my habits because of realizing the dangers, so I do not do that as much as I used to.

When you talk about the education aspect, I think the young people will be the ones who will help sell this. With my grandchildren, when you get in the car, the first thing they say is about putting your seatbelt on. They've been inundated with that in either preschool or through advertisements about always having their seatbelts on, so I think it will be the really young people—

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes. They'll be talking and reminding us not to use our cellphones when we're driving—just like it is about using our seatbelts. I think our future is with the youth of the country, so I hope that they'll do their part to encourage their siblings, their parents and grandparents to not use these cellphones.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): There's time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I've got all the time in the world for the member from Durham. He, not infrequently, has expressed his affection and admiration for me. On one occasion, in this very chamber, he made it clear that he still thought I was number one. That, as a matter of fact, is a very popular YouTube hit. If people want to access it on YouTube, type in the appropriate keywords and you'll watch the very film footage of John O'Toole making it clear to the world that he thought that I was number one. A misplaced digit perhaps, but in the excitement of the moment, I understand—and perhaps there were some arthritic conditions that prevented him from raising the index finger.

Let's not be naive. With all due respect, the member from Durham didn't drive this legislation. I wish he did. The Premier had a chance, when it was first introduced some years ago, to seize the moment and be on the leading edge. But no, the Premier looked out and saw the weather vane, and there was still some very libertarian opposition to governments telling people that they could not use cellphones.

Mr. John Yakabuski: He licked his index finger and put it up to the wind.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mr. Yakabuski is very, very clear about the manner in which this government tests the audience before presenting legislation. So here we are

trailing the pack, instead of leading the pack as O'Toole would have wanted us to do. The praise for Mr. O'Toole, these efforts to co-opt him—it sounds as if the government thought they could scratch him behind the ears and he was going to follow them home. I know better. Mr. O'Toole is not going to be duped by these false words of praise coming from government members.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Durham has two minutes to respond.

Mr. John O'Toole: I thank all the members: the member from Timmins–James Bay, certainly, for his role, and I did comment at some length about his contribution here, and I would hope all people are on the same wavelength; the member from Eglinton–Lawrence; as well as the member from Sarnia. I'm sure the member from Sarnia is relieved that Bill 119 has left the docket, because he was speaking every day for weeks, trying to bring some logic and commitment into Bill 119, and he sadly failed in that task.

He did speak directly to youth when referencing Bill 126 and the implications for the graduated licence for young people.

There's no question that I certainly have affection for the member from Welland. Whether he's number one is another issue, but I certainly respect his contribution here as well—on most days.

The other part I would like to say on the bill is that I want to remain committed to working with the ministry from the information that I've received. This information I've received is from knowledgeable stakeholders, and I have, in some instances, sent it on to the minister on my journey towards this bill, over the last eight or nine years, on the cellphone and the hand-held technology. I believe he's on the right track. There are some minor, I would say, administrative amendments that would help it. In that case, I would just like to have the bill renamed the John O'Toole Act. That's said in jest.

What I meant by that is that all of us here want to make a contribution, and this is one more example in this bill where two members, the member from Timmins–James Bay and myself—representing three different parties, because it is a Liberal bill—I think would be happy to see these changes made and vote in support of the legislation, but we'd like to have public hearings to make sure that the minister and ministry get it right.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being close to 10:15, this House is in recess until 10:30 later on this morning.

The House recessed from 1009 to 1030.

WEARING OF RIBBONS AND BUTTONS

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I seek unanimous consent for members to wear white ribbons and rose buttons in support of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, which are available in both lobbies.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome, from the riding of Elgin–Middlesex–London, in the Speaker's gallery, Cathy Topping, a member of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada government relations and social action committee, and Pat Chatten. Welcome to Queen's Park, Cathy and Pat.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier. Premier, yesterday we heard reports that US president-elect Obama is pressing Congress for an economic stimulus package as quickly as possible, well before the new administration takes office. Today, we hear that Finance Minister Flaherty intends to table an early federal budget because, as they see it, of the urgent need for action.

Premier, can you indicate what your government plans to do in this regard? Are you planning an early budget?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: No final decision has been made with respect to the timing of the budget and obviously, we want to do that in keeping with public interest. But I can say, on the issue of stimulus, that I'm proud to report that we have a stimulus package under way. Just this past summer, Minister Watson announced that we're putting out \$1.1 billion through our municipal partners to invest in infrastructure projects. We've got about a hundred major public construction projects under way right now. We've got a five-year, \$30-billion infrastructure plan that will create some 100,000 construction jobs. Our stimulus package is under way.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I think that perhaps everyone around the globe, with the exception of the Premier, recognizes that there's been a sea change in not just Ontario's economy but worldwide over the past few months. Your government's reaction, or perhaps lack of reaction, certainly doesn't elicit confidence. You're leaving the impression, perhaps an accurate one, that you have no plan to confront the current economic challenges.

Premier, if that's not accurate, tell us, for example, what you're doing to change the Next Generation of Jobs Fund and the Second Career strategy so that they can actually help employers and people who've lost their jobs.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're working on those fronts as well. We've not had a lot of support, I must say, from the opposition in the past when it comes to these kinds of programs.

Let me speak for a moment about our Second Career strategy. We've got a program that's the first of its kind.

It's designed to help up to 20,000 Ontarians who've lost their jobs and provide them with thousands and thousands of dollars by way of support for tuition and any back-to-school expenses. But we've been having a hard time encouraging people who've lost those jobs to come and participate in this program, so we're speaking to those folks to find out what we might need to do in order to tweak that program to make it more attractive and more affordable for them to remove themselves from the economy for up to two years' time. It's not an easy thing to do—we understand that—but we'll keep working with folks who've lost their jobs to make sure we get it right.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: This is clearly a government adrift. They're not even willing to put the sail up because they don't know which direction they want to go in. They're cramming the finance committee's pre-budget process into one week before Christmas. We're told this is being done to accommodate an once-in-a-lifetime vacation for one of their members. We have a so-called emergency resolution sitting on the order paper dealing with the economy never being called for debate. I have to ask: What planet are you operating on over there?

People need to know you have a real plan of action. Will you commit, Premier, to bringing in a budget no later than February 1 of this coming year that spells out a real economic action plan?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I had the opportunity this morning to speak to these kinds of questions raised by members of the media. The point I made then is the point I'll make again. I think it's important to draw a distinction between being precipitous and moving ahead with action that's grounded in thoughtfulness. I know that the global economy remains in a state of flux. I understand that it's affecting Ontarians different ways on different days; I understand that. But at the same time, I want Ontarians to take heart knowing a few things. Number one, of all the places on this planet in the which to seek shelter from this global economic storm, there's no better place than Ontario, Canada. I saw Prime Minister Brown last night on TV, speaking about how they were aspiring to take on some of the policies that we've taken here in Canada. So I think I would ask Ontarians to have some confidence in the foundation that we've built together over the years and to know that we're on the job and we're moving ahead with our five-point plan to strengthen—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is also for the Premier. Is there currently a surplus of hospital beds and nursing physicians in our province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll give this to the Minister of Health.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. David Caplan: I'm quite pleased with the level of investment. We've seen an over-\$11-billion invest-

ment—a 37% increase—in the province of Ontario: over a billion dollars to reduce wait times; funding for over 8,000 new nurses. I would compare and contrast that with the member opposite. During their time in government, we saw a reduction in the number of nurses by over 6,000 under their watch.

We've seen innovative new programs like family health teams, 150 to oversee 1.8 million additional Ontario patients. We're expanding family medical school residency spaces by 87% and medical school spaces by 23%. We have over 100 major hospital capital projects which are currently underway through ReNew Ontario, our government's capital infrastructure—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Mr. Speaker, through you to the Premier: Your minister's answers continue to insult the intelligence of people in the province of Ontario who are seeing a decreasing access in care when it comes to health. First of all, let me remind the Premier that we added 12,000 nursing positions and, I would also say to you, currently we are seeing hundreds of nursing positions cut by this government, outpatient services and beds. Hospitals are desperately trying to balance their budgets at a time that they have fixed costs of about 5% as a result of heat, hydro and salary increases.

You said you would protect public services. I ask you today: How many more nurses and patient services and beds are going to be cut and eliminated?

Hon. David Caplan: I think I've highlighted the difference and contrast between the approach of the member and between this government. In fact, it is the avowed position of the member opposite and her party to eliminate the Ontario health premium that funds health care for \$3 billion annually in the province of Ontario. I think the member quite rightly points out that there would be bed reductions and layoffs to the extent that we've seen previously if they were allowed to form the government and to be able to cut vital services to the tune of \$3 billion in the province of Ontario.

Ontarians, a year ago, rightly said no to that approach. They said that they wanted to see a collaboration, the introduction of family health teams, the introduction of nurse practitioner-led clinics. They wanted to see some of the investments, as we have previously, where we have over 7,000 more front-line staff for long-term care homes and restored staff. We have over 227,000 more Ontarians receiving—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary.

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Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Those responses continue to insult people in the province of Ontario who continually are waiting in emergency rooms for hours. We have long-term-care patients wallowing in beds in hospitals. When is this minister finally going to realize he has a responsibility and an accountability to people who are increasingly, day by day, seeing hospital health care cuts?

I'm going to put the Premier on notice. Starting today, we will track every nurse you fire and every bed you cut.

You've already fired 791 nurses. Taxpayers deserve to know about your haphazard actions.

I ask you today, Premier, where is your plan to prevent the erosion of our health system and access to health care?

Hon. David Caplan: The member is quite incorrect. She equivocates to this House.

Wait times in this province are down, and that's because of sustained and persistent effort. I'll share with the member—in fact, the information is publicly available on a website—angiography wait times are down 53%; angioplasty wait times are down 50%; cataract surgery wait times are down 63%; hip replacement wait times are down 52%; knee replacement wait times are down 51%; CT scan wait times are down 46%; cancer surgery wait times are down 19%; MRI scan wait times are down 18%; pediatric surgery wait times are down 21%; general surgery wait times, in fact, are down 4%.

I've had the great privilege to unveil a pediatric strategy and further general surgical wait times strategy in order to drive wait times down even further.

The real danger would be if that member were—
The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Premier: With each passing day, it becomes clearer that this government has no clue how to deal with Ontario's growing auto jobs crisis. When the Premier is asked about the government's plans to deal with the credit crisis seizing the auto industry, he trots out programs that were announced years ago and have very little relevancy today. When will this government quit harping on the past and instead table a real plan to invest in Ontario's auto strategy?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know the member knows that the challenge before us when it comes to the auto sector is truly national in scope. If it were a simple matter of Ontario competing against Michigan in terms of supports, that would be one thing, but it's the US federal treasury which I believe will ultimately come to the table and provide support to the sector as a whole in the United States of America.

That's why we're working hand in hand with the federal government. That's why I've had a conversation with the Prime Minister. I know that Minister Bryant and Mr. Clement are working closely to ensure that we come to better understand the nature of the challenges that are being put forward by the Big Three in particular, so that we can confirm for ourselves the economic veracity of those challenges and confirm that they are pursuing transformational initiatives. We need to confirm those things before we can come to the table with taxpayer dollars.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: What the auto industry really needs is a credit lifeline that will allow them to survive this unprecedented North American drop in demand for cars.

The Premier keeps talking about other jurisdictions and waiting for other people to come up with a plan. The bottom line is, we know that the car companies get it, the autoworkers get it, Ontario mayors get it; it's only this Premier and this government that don't seem to get it. How much worse does the auto crisis need to get before this Premier gets it and does something about it here in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Although there's a lot of goodwill, there's also a healthy skepticism felt by many taxpayers, not only in Ontario, but nationally, with respect to providing additional support to the auto sector. So we need to, on behalf of taxpayers, make sure we are thoughtful as we approach this determination to provide support. We're going to take a good, long, hard look at the books and confirm the numbers as put forward by the auto sector. We want to make sure that they're pursuing transformational changes. We want to make sure that there's a solid foundation on which we can build, a basis for growth and opportunity long into the future, but that takes a little bit of time, and every single day we are in touch with the auto sector to make sure we're getting this right.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.
Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, that's the problem.

There isn't much time left. The auto industry is saying that it is very quickly running out of cash. Hundreds of thousands of Ontario jobs are on the line because of the shortage of working capital in the industry, yet the government still has no plan. It looks to Washington, it looks to Ottawa for a plan. When will this Premier realize that the plan needs to start right here in Ontario, realize that it's time for a made-in-Ontario, made-for-Ontario plan?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I appreciate the passion and the sense of urgency, but we have an additional responsibility on this side of the House, which is to be thoughtful, and we are going to work closely with the federal government. In fact, I can say we'll be looking to the federal government in large measure, if not wholly, to come to the table when it comes to addressing liquidity issues.

If you take a look at what's been happening around the world when it comes to lending support to the auto sector in the face of liquidity challenges, it is the national level of government that provides that support. So we will continue to work with the federal government. I know our two ministers are working closely together. We'll continue to work with the CAW, with the auto sector and with the suppliers at large, to make sure we land something that everybody can live with, that's responsible and that will ensure the ongoing vitality and viability of the auto sector.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier will know that a recent report by Roger Martin found that per capita incomes in Ontario are falling relative to other jurisdictions. In part, Mr. Martin blamed complacent govern-

ments. Hundreds of thousands of laid-off workers in the manufacturing and forestry sectors know the McGuinty government's complacency all too well. Now that Ontario is in a recession and layoffs are just rolling through in other sectors, when will the Premier take a real plan to sustain and create jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Well, I'm sure we can be accused of all kinds of things, but I don't think complacency is one of them, especially when it comes to developing our human capital, the skills and education levels of our people.

In the last five years, as a result of the efforts that we have made, we've got 100,000 more young people in our colleges and universities; 50,000 more young people pursuing trades; and we're graduating somewhere from 10,000 to 11,000 more young people every year from our high schools who used to drop out.

That has required a significant new level of public investment. We're proud to do that on behalf of Ontarians. It has required a real commitment and understanding to where the economy is going in the future, and it's a knowledge-based global economy. That's why we have so effectively, I would argue, invested in the skills and education of our people.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, complacency is how the 250,000 workers who've been laid off out of forestry and manufacturing feel, frankly.

For five years, New Democrats have been, however, putting forward real ideas—real ideas—to protect Ontario's manufacturing and forestry jobs. Meanwhile, the McGuinty government has been missing in action, as these jobs have disappeared across the province. With surveys and reports indicating even more job losses are looming across all sectors of the economy, Ontarians want to know if their government is going to be there for them.

My question is this: Will the government be up to the challenge or will more Ontarians be told that they're on their own when it comes to protecting their jobs in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Well, it is true that some Ontarians have in fact lost their jobs. We're doing everything we can to support those workers and those communities with additional financial supports and new retraining opportunities for folks who have lost their jobs.

But I think it's important to keep the big picture in mind as well. There's a lot of bad news that's coming across the TV, in our newspapers and on the radio these days through all the various news media, but there are some good sides to the story as well. In the last five years, we got about 500,000 net new jobs in the province of Ontario. Real incomes are up in the province of Ontario. Our unemployment rate is down in the province of Ontario. So I want Ontarians to get the full picture. I don't want to be Pollyannaish on this, but I want them to get the full picture. There is some good news, and we're going to continue to work, particularly with those folks who lost their jobs, to find better opportunities, training

opportunities for them, to strengthen them, so they can get some of the jobs that are out today which are going begging.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, the Premier talks about retraining programs that have been a dismal failure in this province, like the Second Career program.

The Prime Minister and other world leaders have talked about speeding up infrastructure projects as a way of stimulating the economy, but this government's last economic update suggests very clearly that less money for job creation from municipal infrastructure projects are ready to go. Combining immediate funding for these projects with a Buy Ontario policy is one way to sustain and create good jobs in this province. Why won't the Premier table a real jobs plan that includes speeding up infrastructure projects?

1050

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's really important that we all find ways at all levels of government to accelerate our infrastructure projects. That's something to which the Prime Minister has now committed himself when we had our meeting of the first ministers. But again, I'm proud to report on some of the stuff that we've already done. Just two weeks ago we rolled \$1.1 billion out the door to our municipal partners so that they could pursue infrastructure projects that are already on the books and that they had fully planned. We also have, as I mentioned a moment ago, about 100 major construction projects underway in the province of Ontario today. It takes a long time to put in place all the plans to ensure that you get those shovels in the ground, but we've got work taking place now. Thirty billion dollars over five years is the total of our infrastructure plan. There's always more that we can do, and in particular we're looking forward to working with the federal government as they roll out, in a more accelerated way, their infrastructure dollars.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Labour. This past Friday I met with senior management of eight manufacturing companies in the automotive sector employing some 3,000 people in the GTA. We all know the challenges that this sector faces. I asked them what message I should bring to the government's attention. Not one of these companies asked for a bailout. What they did ask for is respect; respect from the people on the front lines representing the government—example after example of disrespectful treatment and intimidation by representatives, agents, specifically of the Ministry of Labour. One of those representatives gave me this tape, which contains a conversation of an agent of the ministry. I'm going to ask the minister this: Will he agree to listen to this tape and will he agree to meet with the employer—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I'll say to the member is that we are here to protect Ontario workers. We are here to make sure that workplaces are safe and are fair places to work. Our government has an excellent track record of working with labour, with employers, with employees, with businesses. Those inspectors that go out there into the job sites work with employers. They want to make sure that those workplaces are safe for those workers. We know the costs, not just the human costs but there are financial costs when those workers are injured on the workplace or, God forbid, when there's a fatality. I don't see the member standing up when fatalities happen in the workplace and going against what our inspectors are doing. Our inspectors are doing their jobs that they're meant to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Frank Klees: I am asking one thing of the minister—just one thing—and that is that he would agree to listen to this tape to see how his representatives are conducting themselves on the front line with employers in this province. That's all I'm asking. And that he would agree to meet with these employers so that they can tell him first-hand how they support workplace safety, but how they would like to get some respect and work in a positive way with representatives of his ministry. Will the minister agree to listen to this tape so that he knows first-hand what is going on, and will he agree to that meeting?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: We respect employers and employees. We work on the principle of fairness and partnership. What our inspectors are doing—and I can tell you those 430 inspectors that are out there in the field are looking to reduce workplace injuries. We have a track record where we've reduced by over 20% lost-time injuries in the workplace. We now have a program called Safe at Work Ontario. Safe at Work Ontario is about working with employers and employees to change the culture in the workplace to address safety. This is good for business, it's good for the bottom line and it's good for Ontario workers.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. The minister and I disagree on the impact of recent changes to the definition of eligibility for temporary care assistance. We keep hearing from more and more grandparents who have been cut off. We need to get to the bottom of this and that's why I'm proposing the appointment of an independent expert to review this program and report back to this Legislature on the state of the temporary care assistance program. Will this minister agree to this?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: The member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek keeps saying in the House that there are so many grandparents that have been cut off and now he's saying that the program has been eliminated, which is not true. He was not even able to find grand-

parents to bring into the House to say that their TCA was cut off. He got up and introduced five grandparents; none of them have been cut off. The program is there, to continue; the program is there.

Again, let's talk about facts. In Hamilton, in July, there were 181 cases; in October, 185 cases. This is in Hamilton; it's going up.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: I appreciate the minister's response. I guess those three busloads meant nothing, and all these other people that are phoning us. The numbers that the minister is quoting could be new cases that have been added on, not counting the other ones.

Grandparents raising their grandkids need and deserve our full support. They and all Ontarians deserve to know that the TCA program is working as it was intended to work. The only way to do that is to bring an independent expert to review the program and make recommendations on how to improve it. I don't know what the minister's afraid of, if everything is as usual. Why doesn't the minister agree to this?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I know very well the program is working because there are more and more grandparents and friends and neighbours and aunts and uncles who are participating in the program, and on a yearly basis, we have about 5,000 children who are benefiting from this program. The program is here to stay.

Let me give other facts, not what the member is saying. Provincially, in July 2008, there were 4,027 cases. In October 2008, four months later, 4,136—more than 100 cases.

The member is going out and scaring grandparents by saying this program has been cancelled. That's not true.

UNIVERSITY LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Mario Sergio: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. As you know, York University is in my riding of York West. The strike started over two weeks ago. It has cancelled classes for approximately 50,000 students. I have heard from many students who are concerned about their studies and are left wondering what will happen to their semester if a resolution is not reached shortly.

Minister, it is unfortunate that a disagreement between the union and the university is adversely affecting York students. I have heard from many people in my community who feel that they are unfairly caught in the middle of this dispute, and there are many questions about what compensation the students will receive for lost time in the classroom. I would like you to tell the House and disconcerted students and parents just what is being done to get students back into classes.

Hon. John Milloy: I'd like to thank the honourable member for his question and for the concern that he has shown, as well as a number of members of this Legislature, for the situation at York University. I appreciate this concern for the students and I want to express my disappointment that both sides were not able to reach an

agreement. I strongly encourage both sides to get back to the negotiating table and reach an agreement as soon as possible that's in the best interests of students.

I think, as members are aware, universities are responsible for their own labour relations and I do not have the authority to intervene in such matters. As a result, I will be passing the supplementary to my colleague the Minister of Labour.

1100

I do want to point that any questions concerning compensation for missed classes must be directed to the university, as this is a decision that's made by their board of governors. However, I'm monitoring the situation very closely.

I understand that both the union and the university have been posting daily updates—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Mario Sergio: I'd like to thank the minister for the concern he has expressed. As well, I would like to echo the comments made by our Premier this weekend on the importance of education and the need for us to have a well-educated workforce to keep Ontario competitive in the future.

I understand that the union and the employer are responsible for resolving their differences at the bargaining table. I also understand that the Ministry of Labour has mediators assisting the parties—the employer and the union—during their negotiations. My question to the minister is, what role is the government taking in this matter and how can they assist in bringing the parties back to the table?

Hon. John Milloy: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Our government understands the importance of stable labour relations. Fair and stable labour relations is the cornerstone of Ontario's economic success.

The Ministry of Labour promotes a constructive labour relations climate and fosters productive workplace relations in Ontario. Over the past few years, more than 97% of negotiations have resulted in settlements with no work stoppage. That's an outstanding result.

We've come a long way, and our success is due, in part, to our government's approach to labour relations. The ministry's labour relations activities focus on settling workplace disputes and assisting in the settlement of collective agreements.

Ministry of Labour mediators are available to assist parties at the negotiating table at York University. It's our hope that the parties get back to the table and come up with an arrangement that is beneficial to both parties.

CHILD PROTECTION

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. We have all heard the horror stories about the deaths of Jeffrey Baldwin and Katelynn Sampson. The Attorney General introduced a bill yesterday to help protect children in custody cases.

Minister, your ministry is responsible for the child protection system in Ontario. Will you tell this House what specific steps you have taken to protect children at risk, in response to the Baldwin and Sampson cases?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Of course, the member opposite raises an issue that is of great concern to every member in this House.

I want to express my support to the Ministry of the Attorney General for the proposed amendments to the Children's Law Reform Act. Several measures are being proposed to provide the court with comprehensive information when making a determination about the best interests in custody cases.

Our plan to improve the safety of children has four parts. I probably will need the supplementary to continue, but if the Speaker will indulge me, every person applying for custody of or access to a child would be required to complete a sworn statement that sets out all the facts and circumstances that relate to the child's best interests. This would include how they propose to care for the child. It would apply both to parents and non-parents.

I will continue in the supplementary—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm hoping that you can answer, in the supplementary, the question I'm going to ask.

The only bill that your ministry currently has before this House is to move convicted young offenders from one ministry to another. Why is there no bill before this House from your ministry to reform the child protection system? When will we see a bill?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me just begin by saying that we are working very, very hard with the legislation that we have to implement the improvements that have been made to the system since we were elected.

In addition, the bill that is before the House will require that a non-parent who is applying for custody of a child be directed to submit a recent police record check as part of the application process. It is a similar requirement that already exists for volunteer positions that involve direct access with children, such as child care workers or Boy Scout leaders. Non-parents applying for custody would be required to provide the court with information about any file or record that they may have had with a children's aid society. This is a change that my ministry and the Ministry of the Attorney General have worked very closely on to make sure that that information is before the judge.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Minister, currently in Ontario, a 16-year-old can get a private pilot's licence and fly multiple passengers in a private plane. In Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, that same 16-year-old driver will not be allowed to carry more than one passenger while driving a car. Isn't the real issue how we train drivers? If we can train a 16-year-old to fly a private plane, shouldn't we be able to train 16-year-olds to drive a car safely?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Well, I know that the member is sincere in his question. I know he will be just as sincere when five kids are killed in a car accident and the matter is raised in the House, because on many occasions, members have legitimately raised issues when young people have been killed in car accidents. As you know, they are three and a half times more likely to have an accident than someone, for instance, aged 30 to 35—three and a half times as likely to have those accidents when there are a number of kids in the car.

Every group that we consulted on this which was involved with safety, including some parents who had gone through this, indicated they wanted to see this extension that exists already from midnight to 5 a.m. They wanted to see it extended, for the one year of graduated licensing, for the entire day.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I'd be interested to know how many young people that minister actually consulted on this bill.

The point is this: We currently have people who are 16 years of age who can be trained as private pilots in this province, as across this country. The safety record is impeccable. There are no statistics that indicate a 16-year-old pilot is any more safe or any less safe than a 50-year-old pilot, and they're able to carry multiple passengers in a private plane. The issue is that of training. Shouldn't we be putting our emphasis on making sure that we properly train young drivers in being responsible and understanding what needs to be done to be as safe as possible? Or is this strictly discrimination on the part of this government towards young people?

Hon. James J. Bradley: The member would be aware that that's exactly what we have done: We have changed the training program. The young drivers who are now going through graduated licensing have a far superior program to what they had many years ago.

It was your government, I remember, in the 1990s, who brought in legislation of this kind. I remember there was a lot of opposition to it; probably if you went back in Hansard, you might even find me raising those kinds of issues. I shouldn't do that. But that's exactly what happened, and as a result of graduated licensing—that your government can take credit for—I'll tell you that the roads are a lot safer.

British Columbia, as you know, has this legislation in place at the present time. In fact, the British Columbia legislation is even more onerous. I know it's an imposition. I'm looking forward to the input that will come from committee. I know the member's looking forward to that as well. We're always looking at the quality of arguments put forward and we're always prepared to enter—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: My question is to the minister responsible for women's issues. Last week, I

had the privilege to go on a ride-along with the Hamilton Police Service downtown. I witnessed first-hand the professionalism and courage with which Hamilton's officers combat violence against women in our community. Although this is an integral part of supporting women in our communities, I know that there is much more to do.

Violence against women remains a horrible reality in our communities. The need to address this problem has been recognized throughout the world. Nine years ago today, the United Nations declared November 25 International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Can the minister please tell this House how the government is recognizing this day?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Everyone has the right to live without the threat of violence, and that includes all women in Ontario. I am pleased to rise today to recognize the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Marking this day reminds us all that many women do not enjoy the fundamental right of safety.

Today marks the beginning of 16 days of activism against gender violence, including Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women on December 6, and ends with Human Rights Day on December 10. During this time, our partners in the community are leading important awareness campaigns, including the White Ribbon Campaign and the YWCA rose button campaign. We have buttons on hand for all members to wear. I invite you to wear them to show your—

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: While it's good to know that our government is once again joining the call for the elimination of violence against women, we must ensure that resources are provided to help our communities stop this violence and support victims of abuse.

There are agencies working to prevent violence against women through awareness and outreach. In addition, they provide the necessary shelter and support to help women get their lives back on track. In Hamilton, we are fortunate to have Interval House as a safe haven which is free of violence and full of support for women. However, organizations like Interval House need our support in order to make a difference in the fight against violence against women.

Can the minister please outline how the government is supporting these community partners?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Our government believes in partnerships. We can't do it alone. The reality of violence is ugly. It devastates lives. It psychologically scars children. It has no place in a civilized society or a healthy community. That's why our government is doing the work to move us further along a better path to a society free of violence against women.

I acknowledge the extraordinary people, organizations and agencies across the province that work so hard to help abused women start new lives. With our community

partners across the province, we're committed to supporting women to turn the page, to begin to live their lives in peace, security and safety, as is their right. We are investing \$208 million annually in programs and services that tackle violence against women. Since 2003, it's an increase of funding to community-based services for abused women by 40%—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Minister of Finance: I attended the Coalition After Property Tax Reform's convention this weekend, taxpayers who have been whacked by massive property assessments under Dalton McGuinty's new scheme. They pointed out that in Dalton McGuinty's have-not Ontario, real estate prices in Toronto have dropped by 13%, the biggest drop in 17 years; in the GTA, it was an 8% drop. But under your new assessment scheme, homeowners are locked into values as of January 1, 2008, at the height of a hot housing market. In short, if you get hit by a massive assessment increase, you are stuck with higher property taxes, with no hope for relief until 2012.

Minister, given the drop in real estate prices in the area, do you think this is fair?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Again, I remind the member that an increase in assessment does not mean an increase in property taxes. You can say that a thousand times, and you might even believe it, I say to the member, and you might try to convince other people of that. It is simply not the case.

The assessments have gone out across the province. They do not imply or otherwise suggest a tax increase. Municipalities have the tools available to them to equalize it; that is, to not see an increase resultant from a change in assessment. I would ask the member to bear that in mind in all these discussions. An increase in assessment does not translate into an increase in taxes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: If the minister had tried that line in front of 400 or 500 beleaguered homeowners and taxpayers at the CAPTR meeting, they would have laughed him right out of the room, because they know that Dalton McGuinty's massive assessment increases are leading to higher property taxes across the province on the backs of already beleaguered taxpayers trying to make ends meet.

Minister, you've also long maintained that only the rich benefit from assessment caps. In reality, homeowners with modest incomes have seen some of the highest spikes in assessments under your new scheme. For example, in Toronto, working families have seen a 28% increase in Parkdale–High Park, a 32% increase in Trinity–Spadina and a 33% increase in Danforth. These are hard-working, middle-class families already struggling to make ends meet in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. Or, Minister, do you believe these families are simply the rich and famous?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Again, I just have to re-emphasize that an increase in assessment does not lead to an increase in property taxes.

Now, I understand why the member opposite wouldn't take my word for it, but let me read to him a quote from somebody I am sure he would put great confidence in—Ernie Eves, in Hansard, November 30, 2000: "I want to get a point across because everybody, whether you're a homeowner or whether you're a business owner, is now getting their assessment notice. The assessment notice is not a tax bill. It is a statement of what the assessment corporation believes your property to be worth...."

In addition to that, we have provided a property tax credit for seniors and enhanced it. Both times, that member and his party voted against it.

Ontarians need to understand: An assessment increase—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question?

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Premier. A letter from the Minister of Energy was published today in the *Globe and Mail*, indicating that the Ontario government is committed to no new nuclear. Does this mean the government has finally abandoned its risky and costly plan to build new reactors in Darlington and instead will replace coal plants with conservation and renewable energy? Tell us it's true.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think the member is very much aware that our commitment is to maintain existing nuclear production and to hold the line in terms of the capacity that's available to us in that regard. She'll know as well that we've made a specific commitment to eliminate coal-fired generation in Ontario by 2014.

Let me take this opportunity to encourage all Ontario communities—I know that there's a debate taking place in Toronto right now, and that's good and that's helping—to consider the benefits of our doing more together to harness renewable sources of energy like both solar and wind.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The minister stated clearly in his letter that the government is committed to no coal and no new nuclear. He failed to mention that the government plans to build two new multi-billion dollar reactors in Darlington.

Will the Premier ask his minister to write to the *Globe and Mail* to retract his misleading statement and clearly indicate—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I will withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: —to retract his unfortunate statement and clearly indicate to Ontarians and Canadians that the government does in fact plan to spend tens of billions of dollars bringing on new nuclear energy in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It is hardly a surprise, because we have gone through a lengthy process to make sure it is as fair and transparent as possible, that we are going to be building new nuclear reactors in Ontario. That's not a surprise, but we're going to maintain the capacity level at its existing level. We want to do that as part of a comprehensive long-term plan to ensure that we have, as much as possible, clean, affordable, reliable sources of electricity in Ontario.

Again, if my friend wants to bring her passion to this—and I know she's got all kinds of that—I'd encourage her to encourage more Ontarians to take a look at the opportunities that we can find together by harnessing the power of the sun and the power of wind—by harnessing renewable sources of energy.

CARPOOLING

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. With the public interest in green transportation increasing and with gas prices fluctuating the way they have been, the constituents in my riding and drivers across Ontario seem to be re-evaluating their driving habits. They are looking for ways to lessen visits to the pumps and ways to decrease the greenhouse gas emissions they produce.

I realize that this government has recognized these priorities, including its \$17.5-billion Move Ontario 2020 commitment for public transit. However, public transit is not the answer for everyone. It is important to recognize other practices that are also beneficial to the environment and to wallets, such as carpooling.

I'm wondering if the minister can share with this House what his ministry is doing to promote carpooling here in Ontario.

1120

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's an excellent question. I know the member has had interest in it for some period of time. As the member would know, the government of Ontario has introduced legislation that, if passed by the Legislature, will amend the Public Vehicles Act to make it easier for people to engage in carpooling. It will reduce the number of single-occupant vehicle trips, resulting in a decrease in air pollution. We recognize that carpooling is an important way to ease congestion and make travelling more convenient for those who are doing so.

I know my friend from Timmins—James Bay would agree with you and me, because he brought in a private member's bill in this regard, that this is an excellent part of that piece of legislation.

So, I want to commend the member for this. We have made it easier. I think ultimately we will see a lot more carpooling taking place.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Just for the members' benefit, the big print is because I can't see very well.

Again, my question is to the Minister of Transportation.

I'm pleased to hear that this government is committed to making changes to the current Public Vehicles Act to address the issues surrounding carpooling in Ontario. Sharing a ride with someone is a great way to save time and money and to help the environment.

Recently, there has been an issue raised surrounding carpooling and those who are trying to help the province to provide the service. This has affected many people in my riding and, I'm sure, others across Ontario.

Those who choose to carpool do not want antiquated red tape to stand in their way. I'm hoping the Minister of Transportation can share with this House how his ministry is proposing to remove the barriers and red tape associated with forming carpools in Ontario.

Hon. James J. Bradley: The legislation itself will be very helpful in that regard. The member knows that part of the legislation deals with hand-held electronic devices which are a distraction, but the second half of the legislation deals with a difficulty that people had encountered with carpooling that actually ended up before the Ontario transport board. Of course, as minister I am not allowed to comment on the Ontario transport board's deliberations or rulings, but I can tell you that when this matter was brought to our attention, we decided that we would proceed with this legislation. Indeed, I think we'll do it in such a way that it does not negatively impact taxi companies or bus companies. At the same time, the legislation will allow for carpooling on a much easier and informal basis than was the case in the past.

UNIVERSITY LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Minister of Labour. We are now in day 20 of the York University strike. Day seven marked the point of no return for students in all fall term half courses. On day 14, the university announced that all courses will need remediation adjustments. Students are desperate to know what the day of jeopardy is and what your plans are to address the strike issue. Students are contacting me and asking how they will be able to salvage their academic year and their postgraduate plans. I want to know, Minister, according to you, what is the day of jeopardy for these students, and whether it matters enough for you to act. When are you going to act?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I thank the member for the question. I want to echo some of the comments that the Premier made on the weekend about the importance of education and that we are able to compete globally in these very challenging times.

One of the things that has allowed us to compete globally is our labour relations. We have excellent labour relations in the province of Ontario. We believe in the collective agreement process; we respect it.

We want the parties to come back to the table. We ask them to double their efforts. We have a mediator working with the parties. I understand that they are coming back to the table. That's the right thing to do, to resolve their differences and get those students back in the classrooms.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Peter Shurman: It would sure be nice to get an answer to the question.

You may know, Minister, that nine out of 18 CUPE locals at Ontario universities have contracts expiring in 2010, with five more in negotiations on contracts expiring this year, one of which is York. This means that in 2010 we will potentially be faced with a province-wide shutdown of most universities in Ontario, should those universities not cave to the union's future demands. If you are not willing to save York University students now, will you at the very least commit to protecting all Ontario university students, going forward?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to the member, it's best to take a balanced, stable, progressive approach, working with all parties, making sure that we assist with our mediators to bring the parties to the table so they can resolve those differences. The best agreements happen when all parties come to the table and resolve those differences. That is what we are doing.

We understand the importance, especially in the education sector, of getting those students back into the classroom. It's about our competitive edge, and we know that our competitive edge is with our human resources, our people, here in this province. That's why we have had stellar labour relations: 97% of all collective agreements are done without work stoppage. We will continue to work with those parties. We will continue to build on the success that we've had, and we will continue to focus on those students.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Finance. By now, virtually all Ontario homeowners have received their property assessment notices. The government scheme of a four-year assessment does nothing for property owners whose homes have been valued on January 1, 2008. Today, 10 months later, values in places like Toronto have gone down 13%, and in other towns they've gone down by as much as 20% because of devastating job losses and the swiftness of the present economic downturn. My question to the Minister: What is the government's plan to assist people whose homes have been assessed at unrealistically high values?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I remind the member opposite again, the mechanisms are in place to adjust the tax rate. The calculation of property tax is the rate times the assessment. You can adjust the rates; the mechanisms are there for municipalities to do that. Again, I stress to the people of Ontario, an increase in assessment does not imply or necessarily lead to an increase in taxes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Prue: I never once mentioned the word "tax." I'm talking about the assessment. The council of the city of Cambridge, and I suspect more municipalities will join in, has passed a resolution seeking the government's help. Cambridge council has requested that the minister help soften the blow and defer the four-year

phase-in for property tax increases by one year and make it from 2010 through 2013 in order to help assess the downturn. How will this government answer the city of Cambridge's request?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We won't agree to it. The assessment is phased in over four years. There are mechanisms to adjust so that taxpayers don't see an increase resulting from the assessment. There is no doubt that we've experimented on 100 different occasions. There are seven pieces of legislation by the previous government on this. The assessment notices do not imply a tax increase. We believe and agree with those, and there are many of them, including the Ombudsman, who say we are getting this right, and because of that, my inclination now is to say no, we don't agree with them.

MUNICIPAL TAXATION

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, in these tough times, a lot of municipal taxpayers and a lot of municipalities really fear what might happen if unemployment goes up and the welfare rolls increase. The question I have for you is this: For years we have been asking for welfare to be taken off property taxes. We've said take Ontario Works and upload it, because the last government downloaded all those onto the property taxes. So I'm asking you, Minister, in this new agreement that you've signed with the city of Toronto, and with AMO, what provision is in this new agreement that would alleviate some of the welfare pressures off property taxes? What is in the agreement to do that?

Hon. Jim Watson: I want to thank the honourable member, who understands the challenges municipalities face because of his time on municipal council in the city of Toronto.

When we signed the agreement, which was a 10-year agreement with the municipal sector through AMO and the city of Toronto, the number one priority from the municipal sector was to take the social income redistribution programs away from the property taxpayer and put it back to the provincial government, where it belongs. The president and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Len Crispino, said this about the deal:

"The 10-year plan announced today to upload \$1.5 billion in social assistance benefits and court security costs from the municipalities will go a long way to easing the burden on the property tax base, and addressing the long held concerns of our members. Today's progress is even more significant because it represents a major step forward despite the challenges presented by today's economic"—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Mike Colle: Minister, in these unprecedented economic times, all municipalities have increasing concern about the labour market in their cities. They're worried about taxpayers losing their jobs.

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Colle: I know the Conservatives don't care about people who are finding tough times, but the muni-

cipalities care about the workers and they want to make sure that we can get as many jobs as possible in our cities and towns across Ontario. What else has your ministry done to ensure that all the infrastructure work on bridges, roads, on public transit—that there's money for these jobs, for these workers, in municipalities across Ontario? Is there any infrastructure program—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Jim Watson: As the Premier said earlier, the Investing in Ontario Act, just about two weeks ago, saw \$1.1 billion in new infrastructure money go to every community, to all 445 municipalities in the province.

The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke asked, “Well, what about infrastructure?” The good people of Pembroke are receiving \$1.3 million in infrastructure money, and unlike the other government, it's not some novelty blow-up rubber cheque. This is money that is already in the bank, thanks to the Minister of Finance and the investing in Ontario program.

We're proud of the relationship that we have developed with the municipal sector over the course of the last five years, and we're not waiting to upload, we've already begun it: ODSP, ODP, the gas tax, land ambulance, public health, Ontario Works is coming down the line, and court security and prisoner transportation. These are significant investments and it will—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Earlier in question period I asked the minister if he would listen to a tape recording of the conduct of his agents in the field. I appreciate the fact that the minister sent me a note agreeing that he would, in fact, listen to that tape.

I now would like to ask the minister this: Will he agree to the second part of my request, which is that he would meet with these employers personally to get a first-hand account of what is happening on the front lines by his agents and how they are conducting themselves in the field? Will he agree to have that meeting?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I am always open to meeting with employers. This is a partnership. It's a partnership between employers and labour and employees. We believe in partnerships; that's the way we strengthen Ontario. But we also believe that our inspectors are doing a job that is necessary, to go into workplaces and ensure health and safety for Ontario workers. They're doing a good job. We've seen the results and we want to continue to make Ontario the safest place to work.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): No, sorry. The time has expired; no supplementary. The time for question period has ended. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1133 to 1500.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Introduction of guests?

Welcome to everyone visiting the chamber today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

BUY LOCAL

Mr. John Yakabuski: A couple of years ago, the Renfrew county Buy Local committee was formed to encourage consumers to think local when planning their purchases. That campaign has been a huge success. Earlier this fall, over 6,000 people attended this year's Taste of the Valley event in Cobden, which showcases locally grown or produced food products. As committee member Dave Fisher said, people have recognized the value of keeping as much spending as possible within their own community.

As an extension of the Buy Local campaign, the community introduced the municipal challenge campaign. This was to recognize that municipalities can lead by example in keeping their purchases local. Each municipality was asked to track what percentage of their purchases were made within their own community or in the county of Renfrew.

As a former small business owner, I am pleased to advise the House that the township of Madawaska Valley is the winner of the contest—my home township. The township achieved an impressive 78%; that's right, 78 cents of every dollar were spent locally. I want to congratulate Mayor John Hildebrandt, members of council and all municipal staff for working together to reach such a high percentage. Their success in winning this award clearly demonstrates the commitment of the municipality to their local business community.

I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of the Buy Local committee, particularly April Cappel, the former Buy Local coordinator, for coming up with the idea of the municipal challenge. It has helped everyone focus on the importance of supporting their own.

DEREK HATFIELD

Mr. Charles Sousa: I rise today to recognize the efforts of Mr. Derek Hatfield. Derek is a retired RCMP officer and an accomplished sailor. He sails out of the Port Credit Yacht Club in my riding of Mississauga South, and this year he is competing in the Vendée Globe.

This is a sailor's most valiant single-handed race around the world. The Vendée Globe is held every four years and allows only 30 sailors to compete for the trophy and the title of best single-handed sailor in the world. His boat is named the Spirit of Canada. Launched from France on November 9, it will take him around the three capes. Qualifying for the Vendée Globe is a particularly important achievement, as Derek is the first Canadian ever to do so.

But of course, his journey started well before the launch. After months of fundraising and practice, he set out to sail across the Atlantic and arrived safely in France on September 30. I had the pleasure of meeting Derek in June at the Spirit of Canada send-off at the Port Credit Yacht Club. In speaking with him, I was immediately impressed by his calm and resolve to accomplish this extraordinary goal. In fact, he is well known by all in Mississauga's sailing community for a steady hand and stalwart nature. By facing this enormous challenge with courage and determination, he is truly representing the spirit of all of Canada.

We in this Legislature are incredibly proud of his achievement and wish him well as he takes on the world's best while flying Canada's flag. Congratulations, Derek, and best of luck.

GROWTH PLANNING

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Many residents of Caledon continue to express their disappointment in the decision by Premier McGuinty and Minister Smitherman to refuse to hold an inquiry into the challenges faced by Caledon in implementing provincial growth legislation. The town of Caledon has been threatened with a \$500-million lawsuit. A suit has also been filed against the mayor.

When the province made changes to the Planning Act, it removed the developers' ability to appeal urban boundary expansions to the Ontario Municipal Board. At that time, some developers made it clear that they would seek legal action to achieve their objectives. In the town of Caledon, developers have followed through on the threats.

Caledon's official plan meets the provisions of the government's Places to Grow Act. Caledon's plan calls for the protection of prime agricultural lands within and outside of the greenbelt, and their tri-nodal growth strategy is one of the mechanisms for protecting that land.

Even though the town's planning reflects the provincial guidelines, the province is unwilling to show leadership in ensuring the town is not subjected to unnecessary lawsuits from people who disagree with the plan.

Dealing with these issues is diverting time and resources away from other important local and regional initiatives. The challenges to Caledon's growth management strategy need to be addressed by this government immediately. Caledon needs a strong expression of support from the minister, if not in the form of a public inquiry, then, at the very minimum, a letter of support for the growth management policies in Caledon and for the process by which they were reached. It's the least they deserve to reinforce the town's work in managing growth.

AGRICULTURAL LABOUR POLICY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The fruits of labour were in full evidence on November 17. Eight days ago, the

United Food and Commercial Workers union won an important, hard-won and historic victory for Ontario's more than 100,000 agricultural workers. They toil in the fields, work in the factory farms; they plant and harvest our crops and perform incredibly dangerous work without proper rights, wages or protection.

Last week, the Ontario Court of Appeal upheld the UFCW's position that an Ontario law denies agricultural workers the right to form a union and violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Congratulations to UFCW's Wayne Hanley, Stan Raper, the Agriculture Workers Alliance and all the workers who could benefit.

The landmark ruling targets the Agricultural Employees Protection Act put in place by the Mike Harris government in 2003 after the UFCW won its first charter challenge at the Supreme Court of Canada in 2001. That law said that, unlike workers covered by the Ontario Labour Relations Act, agricultural workers could "associate" but not "unionize."

The Mike Harris Conservatives are long gone, but the McGuinty Liberals continue with the same backwards legislation that the Court of Appeal just struck down. Instead, they should say unequivocally that agricultural workers have the absolute right to belong to a union and that the unconstitutional law will be repealed. Send the signal now that Ontario respects the court's decision and will confer full labour rights on Ontario's agricultural workers.

To date, only eerie silence from the Premier and his ministers. I call on them: Break the silence.

OAK RIDGES-MARKHAM MUSEUMS

Ms. Helena Jacek: I wish to congratulate the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum, the King Township Museum and the Markham Museum and Historic Village, which will collectively receive over \$95,000 between 2008 and 2009 under our government's community museum operating grant program.

The Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum was established 37 years ago and features historic landmarks, including an 1857 Bogartown schoolhouse; the Brown house, an 1857 Victorian farmhouse restored to replicate the 1880s; and the Vandorf Public School, built in 1870. The museum will receive \$28,809, its first grant increase in at least 15 years.

The King Township Museum will receive \$13,511. Housed in an old school built in 1861, it boasts a collection of over 1,800 artifacts, all relating to the rich history of King township.

Markham Museum and Historic Village will receive \$53,143. Established 37 years ago, it features indoor and outdoor exhibits of more than a century of pioneer history.

One does not need to walk far from this chamber to see the impact that museums have on our communities. On the main floor of this Legislative Building, the King Township Museum's glass display case captures the

town's significance to the cultural heritage of both Oak Ridges–Markham and Ontario.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Norm Miller: I have an e-mail from Patsy Beynon of Gravenhurst, Ontario, in opposition to Bill 126 and demonstrating why we need consultations. I will attempt to get most of it onto the record in this short minute and a half.

"I am writing this to let you know how upset I am with the new young drivers law. We, as many others in this province, have chosen to live in an area where there is no public transportation. Because of this, our children need to use their or their parents' vehicles for employment, education, sports etc.

"Many young adults carpool to Georgian College in Barrie, Orillia, Bracebridge or Nipissing or Lakehead University. Carpooling has enabled many to attend post-secondary education. It is difficult enough for many to attend, and this new law would make it even more so.

"As Canadians, our ancestors fought for our many freedoms, which we seem willing to sit back and allow our politicians to take away. We've discussed this new law in my family, and a number of my children are concerned about how it will affect them and any children they may have. We believe that it is discrimination, and does our Constitution not state that we cannot be discriminated against because of age?

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"A number of other issues that have been raised regarding this law are:

"—we can go and fight for our country and our freedom at 18;

"—we can vote at 18;

"—we can marry at 18;

"—we can drink at 19;

"—we won't be able to drive;

"—it will affect the drinking and driving as a number of these people have a designated driver and now that person will only be able to have one other person with them;

"—it will affect the employment that is available to these young adults;

"—it will make it more difficult on families whose children participate in sports or whose children need a vehicle to get to post-secondary education;

"—there will then be more vehicles on the road....

"Thank you for taking the time to read the above and hopefully our politicians will take a hard look at the consequences of this law."

ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Beginning on November 21, the Royal Botanical Gardens hosted a three-day workshop aimed at connecting Ontario's children with nature. One of the largest botanical gardens in the world, this

living museum has been bringing nature to Hamiltonians and Ontarians for over 60 years.

This workshop was entitled Back to Nature and was conducted with the goal of ensuring that our children do not live a life removed from nature. In addition to being concerned with children today, this workshop was forward-thinking, as it recognized that connections established at a young age will last for a lifetime. In other words, bringing nature and children together will result in a green Ontario for generations to come.

The Royal Botanical Gardens's dedication to Hamilton's children falls directly in line with the city's vision to be the best place in Canada to raise a child.

I'd like to thank RBG for their wonderful work in organizing this workshop, as well as their vision and understanding that connecting children with nature will result in a greener, healthier and more prosperous Hamilton and Ontario.

NEUROMODULATION

Mr. Dave Levac: Today, the Neuromodulation Coalition is at Queen's Park to raise awareness about the benefits of neuromodulation therapies. With us are William Orłowski, Ian Pearson, Kit Pearson, Linda Gibson, Stephen Yeates and Maxine Bergman, who all have had this process. It refers to surgery to implant devices that provide electrical stimulation of peripheral nerves, the spinal cord or the brain to alter nerve impulses.

These specialized and effective therapies have the potential to provide significant improvements in the quality of life for people living with chronic pain, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, dystonia, other movement disorders and urinary incontinence. In some cases, it has enabled patients to regain the ability to walk after suffering debilitating injury to the brain or spinal cord or after the onset of multiple sclerosis. In the case of my brother, they stopped the tremors of Parkinson's and gave him a quality of life such that he can now dress himself, feed himself and walk.

Patients who seek treatment from neuromodulation come from all walks of life, including the young, the old, men, women, and people of all economic circumstances.

The coalition is here to talk to many members in the House, and I hope that we will pay attention to them. They'll tell us about the quality of life that they have now gained from receiving this beautiful piece of medical marvel.

ADVOCIS

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: It's a privilege to welcome members of Advocis to Queen's Park today.

Advocis is the largest voluntary professional membership association of financial advisers in Canada. Its members are financial advisers licensed to distribute life and health insurance, mutual funds and other securities. They provide financial and product advice to millions of

Ontarians and Canadians across a variety of distinct areas, including comprehensive financial and retirement planning, finance and wealth management, estate and tax planning, risk management, and employee benefits planning. For more than a century now, Advocis members have provided professional advice to Ontarians, delivering security and peace of mind.

Professional financial advisers have lasting relationships with their clients, so in times of financial market turmoil, they act as a calming influence because they take a long-term planning perspective and can guide their clients through turbulent times.

I'd like to especially mention two people in the gallery today: Greg Pollock, president and CEO of Advocis; and Roger McMillan, chair of Advocis's provincial advocacy committee and past chair of the national board of directors.

On behalf of all members of the Legislature of Ontario, I'd like to welcome Advocis to Queen's Park today.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on General Government and move its adoption.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 99, An Act to protect and restore the ecological health of the Lake Simcoe watershed and to amend the Ontario Water Resources Act in respect of water quality trading / *Projet de loi 99, Loi visant à protéger et à rétablir la santé écologique du bassin hydrographique du lac Simcoe et à modifier la Loi sur les ressources en eau de l'Ontario en ce qui concerne un système d'échange axé sur la qualité de l'eau.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move its adoption.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / *Projet de loi 119, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 5, 2008, the bill is ordered for third reading.

PETITIONS

HOSPICES

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas hospices on church or hospital property do not pay taxes;

"Whereas hospices are not-for-profit organizations providing emotional, spiritual and bereavement support and respite care to terminally ill individuals and their family members;

"Whereas hospice services are provided free of charge;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow hospices across the province to be exempt from municipal taxes."

I agree with this and will send it with page Zac to the table.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from a number of constituents in my riding.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents;

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks' table.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with Bill 119, the workplace safety and insurance bill, and it reads:

"Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 119, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008, which makes WSIB mandatory for independent operators, partners and executive officers in construction; and

"Whereas this bill will cost the average business owner about \$11,000 while doing nothing to catch cheaters in the underground economy; and

"Whereas this bill will do nothing to make workers safer in the workplace; and

"Whereas there has been insufficient consultation with construction companies and stakeholders to discuss the impact of this bill or other alternatives; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government refuses to allow discussion of this bill with the affected parties through the committee process;

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To revoke Bill 119 or to require the Standing Committee on Social Policy to travel across the province of Ontario in order to provide an opportunity for consultation with affected businesses."

I support this petition.

TUITION

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario have increased by 195% since 1990 and are the third highest in all of the provinces in Canada; and

"Whereas average student debt in Ontario has skyrocketed by 250% in the last 15 years to over \$25,000 for four years of study; and

"Whereas international students pay three to four times more for the same education, and domestic students in professional programs such as law or medicine pay as much tuition as \$20,000 per year; and

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"Whereas 70% of new jobs require post-secondary education, and fees reduce the opportunity for many low- and middle-income families while magnifying barriers for aboriginal, rural, racialized and other marginalized students; and

"Whereas Ontario currently provides the lowest per capita funding for post-secondary education in Canada, while many countries fully fund higher education and charge little or no fees for college and university; and

"Whereas public opinion polls show that nearly three quarters of Ontarians think the government's Reaching Higher framework for tuition fee increases of 20% to 36% over four years is unfair;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students' call to immediately drop tuition fees to 2004 levels and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to introduce a new framework that:

"(1) Reduces tuition and ancillary fees annually for students.

"(2) Converts a portion of every student loan into a grant.

"(3) Increases per student funding above the national average."

I agree with this petition and I have signed it.

LOGGING ROUTE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with logging in the village of Restoule, and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Nipissing forest management plan proposes to use Hawthorne Drive in Restoule, which features a single-lane bridge and narrow and steep sections; and

"Whereas area residents have grave concerns about community safety, traffic speed, truck noise and general wear and tear of Hawthorne Drive and the bridge in the village of Restoule; and

"Whereas the proposed route travels past the Restoule Canadian Legion and two churches; and

"Whereas alternate routes are possible via Odorizzi Road and Block 09-056;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety and concerns of the people of Restoule ahead of logging interests and ensure an alternate route is selected for the Nipissing forest management plan."

I support this petition.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I had promised one of my constituents, Mr. Sukhdev Singh, that I would read a petition that he has very kindly submitted to me today, and I pass along my greetings to him. It's addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly and it reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures

that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I am very pleased to sign and support this petition and to thank the Singh family for having sent it in to me, and to send it down with page Sarah.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Jim Wilson: "Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 119, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008, which makes WSIB mandatory for independent operators, partners and executive officers in construction; and

"Whereas this bill will cost the average business owner about \$11,000 while doing nothing to catch cheaters in the underground economy; and

"Whereas this bill will do nothing to make workers safer in the workplace; and

"Whereas there has been insufficient consultation with construction companies and stakeholders to discuss the impact of this bill or other alternatives; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government refuses to allow discussion of this bill with the affected parties through the committee process;

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To revoke Bill 119 or to require the Standing Committee on Social Policy to travel across the province of Ontario in order to provide an opportunity for consultation with affected businesses."

I agree with this petition and I will sign it.

GARDE D'ENFANTS

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: J'ai une pétition que j'ai reçue de Suzanne Huppé de St. Albert.

« À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Nous, citoyens de la province de l'Ontario, méritons et avons le droit de demander des modifications à la Loi portant réforme du droit de l'enfance, de façon à faire valoir l'importance des relations qu'ont les enfants avec leurs père et mère, ainsi qu'avec leurs grands-parents, comme le prévoit le projet de loi 33, 2008, présenté par le député provincial Kim Craitor.

« Attendu que le paragraphe 20(2.1) de la Loi exige que les père et mère et autres personnes qui ont la garde d'enfants ne doivent pas faire déraisonnablement obstacle aux relations personnelles qui existent entre les enfants et leurs grands-parents;

« Attendu que l'article 24(2) de la Loi énumère les questions dont le tribunal doit tenir compte pour établir l'intérêt véritable d'un enfant. Le projet de loi modifie ce paragraphe de façon à inclure une mention expresse de l'importance du maintien des liens affectifs qui existent entre enfants et grands-parents;

« Attendu que le paragraphe 24(2.1) de la Loi exige qu'un tribunal qui décide de la garde ou des droits de visite d'un enfant applique le principe selon lequel un enfant doit avoir le plus de contact possible avec ses père et mère et avec ses grands-parents, compte tenu de l'intérêt véritable de l'enfant; et

« Attendu que le paragraphe 24(2.2) de la Loi exige qu'un tribunal qui décide de la garde d'un enfant prenne en compte la volonté de chaque personne qui demande, par requête, la garde de l'enfant de faciliter les contacts entre celui-ci et ses père et mère ainsi que ses grands-parents, compte tenu de l'intérêt véritable de l'enfant;

« Nous, soussignés, adressons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario la pétition suivante :

« Que les députés de l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario adoptent le projet de loi 33, 2008, qui modifie la Loi portant réforme du droit de l'enfance, de façon à faire valoir l'importance des relations qu'ont les enfants avec leurs père et mère ainsi qu'avec leurs grands-parents. »

J'appuie cette pétition et j'y ajoute ma signature.

LABORATORY SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with lab services and Muskoka funding of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the residents of the communities served by Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare (MAHC) wish to maintain current community lab services; and

"Whereas maintaining community lab services promotes physician retention and benefits family health teams; and

"Whereas the funding for community lab services is currently a strain on the operating budget of MAHC; and

"Whereas demand for health services is expected to continue to rise with a growing retirement population in Muskoka-East Parry Sound; and

"Whereas the operating budget for MAHC needs to reflect the growing demand for service in the communities of Muskoka-East Parry Sound;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government and the Minister of Health increase the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to permit continued operation of community lab services."

I support this petition.

EMERGENCY DISPATCH SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with 911 services in Muskoka and Parry Sound. It reads, "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is considering relocating emergency ambulance and fire dispatch services currently provided by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service to the city of Barrie; and

"Whereas up to 40% of all calls received are from cellphones from people unfamiliar with the area; and

"Whereas Parry Sound-Muskoka residents have grave concerns about the effect on emergency response times if dispatch services are provided by dispatchers who are not familiar with the area; and

"Whereas 16 Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care-funded jobs, held by qualified communication officers from local communities, may be lost as a result of the relocation of dispatch services to the city of Barrie,

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety, health and economic concerns of the people of Parry Sound-Muskoka ahead of government efficiency interests and ensure that emergency dispatch services continue to be provided locally by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service."

I support this petition.

LUPUS

Mr. Bob Delaney: On behalf of my seatmate, the member from Niagara Falls, I'm pleased to read this petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

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"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no new safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

I'd like to thank the many people who signed, especially a group here from Simcoe, Ontario. I'm pleased to add my signature and to support the petition and to ask page Swapnil to carry it for me.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 24, 2008, on the amendment to the motion by Ms. Smith to authorize the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to meet during the week of December 15, 2008.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Robert Bailey: It is a pleasure to take part in debating the amendment put forward by my colleague the member for Niagara West-Glanbrook regarding adding a list of communities that the finance committee should visit during their pre-budget consultations.

This whole idea of rushing these pre-budget consultations seems very familiar to me. It was just two weeks ago that this government shut down debate on Bill 119, the WSIB bill, despite the fact that it is going to take them four years—four years, ladies and gentlemen—to implement this bill. This government is showing that it is not very fond of consulting. In the last election, they promised to consult everybody—the CFIB, on any changes to the WSIB. They promptly ignored that promise when they introduced the punishing new small business tax in the form of Bill 119.

What the government wants is to rush this pre-budget consultation through the week of December 15, to cloud it with Christmas. When most people are starting to get ready for their Christmas holidays, this government wants them to come to meetings to give them advice on what should be in the budget, when they're going to be out Christmas shopping.

This is a departure from tradition. In the last number of years, as the member for Niagara West-Glanbrook pointed out yesterday, what would normally happen is that we would adjourn the Legislature in December and in January and March the finance committee would travel this province doing pre-budget consultations. The budget normally comes in the spring, so the winter gives this committee lots of time to do a lot of travelling and to hear from many Ontarians on what should be in the budget. Why the rush this year? Does the government want to only hear from a select few Ontarians who will tell them to keep on keeping on? More than likely, though, is that the government wants to bury this committee in the pre-Christmas rush so that Ontarians don't get the real picture about what is going on in this economy.

I just have to look around my own local community and you can see the effects of the downturn on its economy. Lanxess laid off hundreds of people and moved their production to Europe. The government is bound and determined to throw hundreds more Lambtonians out of work when they close the Lambton generating station in 2014. Hundreds of men and women will be thrown out of work and we are already beginning to see the negative impact of this closure. The municipality of St. Clair

township stands to lose over \$1 million in property taxes—17% of their tax base this year alone, which is years before the generating station allegedly will close. This is property taxes that the generating station itself pays to the municipality.

I would like to know why this government doesn't want to hear from Brampton, Cambridge, Chatham, Cornwall, Guelph, Hamilton, Ingersoll, Kitchener-Waterloo, Lindsay, London, Oakville, Oshawa, Owen Sound, Smiths Falls, St. Catharines, St. Thomas, Welland and Windsor—sounds like that Hank Snow song, I've Been Everywhere. My colleague put a lot of time into determining what communities would be appropriate for the pre-budget consultations to take place in. These are all communities that have faced large job losses in recent months.

Just for some examples: Owen Sound, PPG closed, with 170 jobs lost; St. Thomas, the Sterling Truck plant, 720 jobs lost; Guelph, Linamar, 400 to 500 jobs lost; in the Cornwall area, Valspar, with 24 jobs. These are all communities that this committee should be visiting. I think it would be time well spent for the committee to spend a day in Welland. They could hear first-hand about the devastating impact of the John Deere closure. They could hear about what the closure of Henniges Automotive will do to Welland. They will be able to see first-hand the devastating impact of the collapse of that manufacturing sector. In Ingersoll, Cambridge, Oshawa and St. Catharines, this committee would be able to hear from the workers in the auto industry. They would be able to go to those communities and hear and see what the impact is of the slowdown in the auto industry.

I would also remind people who are watching and listening today that the pre-budget consultations actually started on November 20, but you wouldn't know it. The hearings were very poorly publicized and, as a result, there were many holes in the agenda throughout the day.

Why is this important? Why should we get outside of Toronto with the committee on finance and economic affairs? Well, I'll tell you why. Just today, the Conference Board of Canada released a report that showed that the Canadian auto sector will lose 15,000 jobs by the end of 2009. Combined, the auto companies will lose \$1.7 billion and see demand for vehicles drop by another 15.3%.

The Conference Board also said today that those 15,000 jobs lost just in vehicle assembly will translate into many thousands of jobs lost in the parts sector and downstream. The Conference Board is projecting five consecutive quarters of declining consumer confidence and demand, which could send US vehicle sales down to the same level as they were in 1992. These numbers alone are staggering. These numbers are from the Conference Board, not myself. Don't you think that we should go to the communities that are going to be the hardest hit by the decline in the auto sector? They would also be able to see first-hand if the money that the McGuinty government is spending to help our manufacturing sector is working or not. They would be able to hear from the

real people involved. That would probably be the most interesting part.

As my good friend the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook pointed out a couple of weeks ago, this government is very good at making big announcements in big dollar amounts, but when it comes to announcing projects, they are very slow. I could be wrong, but I don't believe there has been one project announced out of the Next Generation of Jobs Fund. That was a huge amount of money designed to help our manufacturing sector, and the government can't even announce one single project. The advanced manufacturing strategy was announced with great fanfare and hoopla, and yet, they have only announced a handful of projects.

The government is planning to do with the pre-budget consultations just what it did to Bills 114 and 119. With Bill 114, the process was just a sham. They actually had it designed so that any amendments to the bill had to be in before the public hearings started. By doing that, they admitted that they had no intention of listening to what anyone said at the committee; they were just going to go full steam ahead. I'm not sure why anyone would have wanted to present to a committee that had no intention of listening to them, and taking their valuable time to travel here to make those presentations.

They did something similar with Bill 119, the WSIB bill. I would remind everyone here that Bill 119 will levy an \$11,000-a-year tax on our small construction companies, just when we want them to start creating jobs—at the worst time. They cut off debate at second reading, allotted only two days for public hearings—all held in Toronto—and will only allow for one hour of debate at third reading. They want to rush Bill 119 through before everyone realizes what they are doing, and now they want to rush through the pre-budget consultations as well.

Maybe they don't want to hear what Kevin Gaudet from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation said when he reminded us that when the McGuinty government took office they immediately introduced the largest tax hike in Ontario's history.

Government spending is absolutely out of control. Just to give you an idea, this government is spending \$20 billion-plus more than when it took office. That represents a 31% increase in program spending—unsustainable in these days. We never could sustain these levels of spending, and now we are going to pay the price for it. Our party has said that, and now we are hearing the same thing from others.

Of course, this government doesn't have much of a plan when it comes to fixing the economy. Just look at the very strange approach it takes to job creation. Just last month, we talked in this Legislature about a business in Guelph called Cash Rolls, which was forced to move its manufacturing division to the United States because the Ministry of Labour wouldn't give them time to come into compliance with new regulations. Closer to home for me is Mr. Chris Cooke, the owner of Huron Web Printing in Wyoming, Ontario, who had a businessman's worst

nightmare come true. I would remind members that Huron Web employs over 100 people and has annual sales of over \$20 million. They print over 14 million grocery inserts every week, making them the largest printer of grocery inserts in Ontario, and these are all shipped to the US for inserts into American papers.

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In October 2005, Huron Web was shut down for nine hours because a Ministry of Labour inspector thought the guards on the printing press were not adequate. Mr. Cooke immediately undertook to get the work presses back online so he could meet his deadlines. One of the presses that was found to be out of compliance he had bought three months earlier and was brand new. The manufacturer of the press, which was built here in Ontario, still believes his press was compliant with all those regulations.

After completing the work, the Ministry of Labour inspector wasn't available, because it was after hours, to come back and certify that the work had been done to compliance. In Mr. Cooke's business, lost time means deadlines and just-in-time delivery dates aren't met, and he loses money. The Ministry of Labour was quick to shut them down but was not so fast to let them get back up and running.

What is worse is, after the fact, Mr. Cooke found out that the interpretation of the safety rules was left up to an individual inspector, so that competitors of Mr. Cooke, with the same presses, were allowed to run and do their press runs. The regulations are not written down, and so it was an interpretation left up to a local inspector.

Another case I know of that impacts the economy—and they would like to speak to this—is a restaurant owner in Sarnia-Lambton who had a government inspector in his restaurant for five weeks, with the result that, at the end of the day, he owed an additional \$1,800 in PST. It took five weeks for a government auditor to find this, plus all his travel and expenses. That seems like a bit of overkill to me.

I would ask, does the government want to rush these hearings before more of these economic horror stories can come out and be told to the committee?

Since the government announced that they would be running a budget deficit this year, I have heard from municipal leaders that they are worried about the dollars promised to help replace their aging infrastructure. This is money that municipalities desperately need to be able to attract jobs that are right now being lost. This government has put themselves into such a financial situation that they cannot guarantee long-term stable funding for our municipalities to help them meet those infrastructure needs.

I would encourage the government to work with the federal government so that they can maximize those dollars in our communities. It seems like the federal government wants to do a massive infrastructure funding—and I would encourage the provincial government to work with them every day.

I don't believe that this government has any idea how to turn this economy in Ontario around. We have lost

over 200,000 manufacturing jobs to date, and the best that they can come up with is a five-point plan that will do nothing. It is like a five-pointed compass; it can take you north, south, east, west or nowhere. This government seems to be keen on going nowhere.

For over a year, and until just last month, this government has repeatedly said that everything is fine with this economy. During the last election, they told Ontarians that we had nothing to worry about. We knew differently. They were whistling past the graveyard.

Since the election, we have consistently called on the Premier to deal with the issues that are impacting our manufacturing sector, and they have done nothing. We have said that you need to deal with the high energy costs that our manufacturers have. We have told this government to reduce the burden of taxes on business and investment. We have asked for this government to immediately eliminate the capital tax.

My party had a plan to help our manufacturers months before the government woke up to the fact that we have a crisis in manufacturing. They should be asking for as much input as possible, not limiting debate and not just restricting it like they want to do with the finance committee.

The pre-budget consultations are a great opportunity to work with the opposition in a non-partisan way, to get out and meet the public and come up with suggestions for inclusion in the provincial budget that will be due sometime this spring. This would ensure it has buy-in, because it's done in a non-partisan way as they tour Ontario and meet with those residents that are going to be so drastically affected.

In order to have meaningful consultations, they need to have time to give time to people to prepare and to come together and offer solutions that we could all get behind and support.

Burying this committee before Christmas will do nothing. It will write a meaningless report, like so many others of this government, and it will sit on a shelf and be ignored.

I believe it is time for this government to use the resources they have to get meaningful consultations and listen to them. If the government gives us the chance, we will work together for the best of Ontario. Right now, this government seems more caught up on scoring partisan points.

I believe that we should open up these hearings to as many Ontarians as possible; open it up to as many people as we can. The whole world is trying to deal with the financial crisis that we find ourselves in, and this McGuinty government seems to be the only one that isn't actually dealing with it. Everyone else is consulting and talking, except for this government. It seems content to withdraw into the Whitney building until it gets better out here.

I would say, pass the amendment offered in the name of the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook, allow the committee to travel through the communities across this great province, hear from the people of Ontario about

their sour economic circumstances, and let's work together for a better Ontario. It's the right thing to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Well, as far as debate, I certainly welcome the debate this afternoon, and when it comes to open and public hearings, the finance minister himself described it as an opportunity to deal with the economic challenges facing this province.

We're again faced with a government rush to hold hearings as quickly as possible—the week before Christmas—in an attempt to silence any dissenting opinions. This just-before-Christmas tour is only five towns; we in opposition submitted a list of 19 towns that should be considered for the tour of the finance and economic affairs committee. That would be a tour traditionally going into the months of January and February in 2009, the same year for which the finance committee would be considering pre-budget submissions.

I know what this government is trying to do in sprinting through the hearings as quickly as possible before the clock brings an end to this woeful fiscal record McGuinty and his crew have earned in 2008. They're trying to avoid even worse signs of economic collapse that surely await us around the corner in 2009.

All signs do point to the fact that you can't spend your way out of this problem. These government ministers really seem to have little clue what to do, and the longer they wait, the further down they'll be in this fiscal morass, this economic hole.

I call on this government to reconsider its slapdash approach to these hearings, follow our advice, follow the traditional approach, and have hearings throughout the new year: in January and February. I'm also urging residents across the province to take an opportunity to sign up for these pre-budget hearings and make your voice heard.

This week, I had an opportunity to address an area meeting of mutual insurance board directors. I'm a former board member, and I recognize the wisdom around the table, wisdom that this government would do well to listen to. We can never underestimate the wisdom of the boardroom and the wisdom of the kitchen table. I continue to ask those people who are footing the bill, whether they've got a diminishing pension plan or pay taxes, to share their wisdom, to get involved and provide their input as we teeter on what has now become one of the most significant economic declines in recent memory.

As a member of the finance committee, I've lost confidence in this government. Clearly, this government needs help. They need advice. They've been caught flat-footed, and it's time they had an opportunity to listen to people out there.

Without that kind of input, this government is doomed to repeat some past mistakes. If this regime gets its way, it will continue to tax and spend more and more, and faster and faster, than any Ontario government previously, leaving the rest of us obviously unprepared, ill-equipped and without the funding to meet some of the

very real fiscal challenges that are now knocking down our doors.

Instead of checks and balances, this government has gone on a spending spree, using taxpayers' cheques with wild abandon. Spending has gone, as we know, from \$69 billion a year to something just under \$100 billion a year; again, spending that has driven us into this dark hole that we now peer out from.

1550

This is a government that went from first to worst. A policy of tax and spend has put this great province not only into a recession but also into have-not status. We only need to look at the headlines to understand the true depth and the dire impact of what is at stake, impacts that could well be better dealt with had the majority of members taken off the McGuinty blinders and listened to the warnings from this side of the House.

Just to be a little more specific, of course really the economic elephant in this room and in this province is our auto industry and our auto parts suppliers. The current industry crisis looms large, has become the focal point in most of our daily media reports with respect to potential financial gloom and despair. There's little doubt that today's auto industry crisis is playing out and it's intimately connected in part to the difficulty of the consumer to access credit. It's linked to that meltdown on Wall Street with respect to the banks, which has shattered consumer confidence, let alone prevented them from accessing any credit in the first place. Although the panic in the credit markets does show signs of abating somewhat, economic news continues to get grimmer. Global demand is slumping. Rich economies plunge into what perhaps could be the deepest recession since the 1930s. There's another word we haven't heard much of in many, many years—"deflation." Although it's unlikely perhaps in a few countries—who's to know?—deflation is now no longer an idle risk. Indeed, deflation, again, characterized by annual falls in consumer prices, could well be increasingly likely.

Since the summer the commodity boom has gone bust, changing the inflation outlook at the time fairly dramatically. The price for crude oil, for example, we've seen go down at one point below \$50 a barrel. It didn't seem that long ago—last summer—when we were looking at \$147 a barrel. I think that was in July. So lower prices for oil, lower prices for houses—

Mr. Mike Colle: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Standing order 23(b) states that the member is supposed to address the item or the motion before him. He's giving his pet theories on the meltdown in the economy. He's supposed to be speaking to the motion, but he's not.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I thought he was speaking to the motion, and I return to the member for Haldimand-Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I remind the member—and the member was a former member of the finance committee—that this is the issue we're dealing with. These are issues that should be discussed not only a few days before Christmas but, as we normally do, throughout

January and February. I don't want to continue to beat that over your head because there are some other deep-seated reasons why it is so important to have this kind of consultation. One word alone—"deflation." That's something that comes up in finance committee hearings.

This Premier has acknowledged, and I quote, "'an element of merit' in the argument that the Detroit auto makers are the architects of their own misfortune and should be allowed to succumb to the discipline of the market."

I don't really agree with that. However, we also know that this is more than just a small problem for Ontario, where most of what is being produced at assembly plants, whether they be Windsor or Oshawa, is high-consumption vehicles. And it's more than just a small problem for this government, because this government did not overtly link the bulk of previous spending of close to half a billion dollars in the auto sector fund, did not seem to link it to green vehicle development, did not seem to link it to any kind of a return or a payback. People are asking, where did that money go and just what did this province get in return? Clearly, any further aid to the auto sector must be attached to job guarantees, must be attached to product guarantees.

Mr. Tory has pledged his support for aid on behalf of carmakers—in contrast to what I just finished saying about Premier McGuinty—with one condition: as long as there's a viable plan. What we've seen in the past, we've seen Ontario Liberals hand out millions of dollars to auto companies over the last four years without securing those assurances, without a viable plan. I am concerned that there would be a repeat of past mistakes. Again, our call for hearings, traditionally through the month of January, through the month of February 2009, for a 2009 budget to enable us to plan for the coming fiscal year—April 1 of 2009.

We do also know that, as the heartland of Canada's auto industry, Ontario would be the hardest hit if any of the Big Three automakers filed for bankruptcy. It would be a devastating blow to the province, which is already facing a \$500-million deficit—likely more in that department. We know that the government has already guided us into the status of have-not province, again, as we collect these equalization payments from Ottawa.

That said, Mr. McGuinty has admitted that if one or more of the three big automakers collapses, this province has no plan B. He would have no idea what to do. In fact, further to that, Premier McGuinty says, if I could quote the Premier, "not even going to think about that." How absurd is that? Why would someone say something like that? A province that is already crying poor, set to be the hardest hit by an auto collapse that we're teetering on as we speak, and we hear there's no plan B. It really might be time, perhaps, for the members opposite to start thinking one up.

You know, this is really part and parcel of the historic McGuinty "Don't worry, be happy" approach. We've seen him coast, spending taxpayers' dollars over the last five years, saving nothing, nothing for a rainy day, and I'm afraid that rain is coming down on the roof today.

Now, that being said, bailing out Detroit would be an open invitation to other companies everywhere—the federal government has referred to the aerospace industry, for example—to apply for aid, with the present recession. I can understand that banks qualify for help, because the entire economy depends upon their services. They're vulnerable to sudden collapses in confidence that can spread to other banks, banks that are probably perfectly solvent. Remember, much of the US bank regulation from the 1930s had been, in my view, foolishly overturned, and I think that was under the Bill Clinton era.

In the United States they have Chapter 11, obviously created precisely to help companies get that protection they need from their creditors while they restructure liabilities and winnow out the good business from the bad. If the North American businesses GM and Ford filed for Chapter 11, their activities elsewhere in the world, as I understand, would be largely unaffected. Even in North America their businesses could continue to make vehicles as they shed costs and renegotiate union contracts and other contracts with suppliers.

In many ways—and when I look at this government—something like Chapter 11 is probably more stable and predictable than depending on government. However, the effects of the auto crisis as the focal point of a possible deflating economy are widespread and long-reaching. Think of someone who just bought a new car. That is a bit of a gamble in these times if you bought one from the Detroit Three. Will your dealer still be there? Will you be able to get spare parts? Will you get an oil change from the same company you bought the car from? When you go to sell the car, where is the second-hand market? People do expect now to get that 60,000-mile warranty. They want that honoured, they want parts, they want to ensure that the dealers have not disappeared; and if the company that made the car has gone bust, it can be virtually impossible, in some cases, to sell that vehicle.

1600

South of the border, we've seen the bank bailout, followed closely by the carmakers pleading for help.

This government again seems to be dithering and seems to be caught flat-footed and looking for help. Obviously, we in opposition offer advice, and people across the province are there to offer advice, if we could have fulsome hearings throughout not only December, but also through January and February, as we lead up to an April 1 budget.

On November 7, General Motors in the US made the revelation that it is in danger of running out of cash before the end of this year. Ford is in a similar position, although it's a little better off, as I understand. As for Chrysler, some feel that its days as an independent entity may well be over. Again, think of the impact of the Big Three taking a nosedive and the consequences on this side of the border. Certainly, for our Canadian subsidiaries of GM, Ford and Chrysler, that alone directly represents 30,000 workers in Canada. For the broader auto sector—the parts sector, the dealers—you're looking at something like 400,000 people in this country alone,

much of them in dozens of Ontario communities. I think that explains why 22 mayors showed up at Queen's Park just the other day.

Some plans have been put forward. I understand that Chrysler has asked Ottawa and Ontario for \$1 billion. I think this is the only Canadian subsidiary that is being specific about just what they're looking for.

We do know that in the speech from the throne, the federal Conservative government said Ottawa would provide additional support for the crippled auto sector and, as I mentioned earlier, for the aerospace area.

In the US, Democratic Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid scrapped plans for a vote on a bill to subtract \$25 billion from the \$700 billion that had been announced earlier for the Wall Street bank rescue fund.

Another thing we have to consider, a little further down the food chain from those currently employed, is the ripple effect on retirees. There are something like 49,000 retired auto workers and thousands more retired salaried staff—and of course, thousands still presently working at Chrysler, Ford and GM in Canada—who stand to see a threat to their pensions if their company goes under. Here in Ontario, I understand that there's really no law that obliges the province to cover a shortfall in the guarantee fund. I know there were disbursements in the past: I think of Massey Ferguson; I think of Algoma up in Sault Ste. Marie.

Our House leader, Bob Runciman, pointed out that this government should be mindful that taxpayers may well be resentful about bailing out a pension plan, especially when so many people in the province of Ontario don't have a pension: "People who have saved for RRSPs over the years and seen the value decline precipitously over the past couple of months, they don't have that fixed (benefit)."

There is little doubt that this is a dangerous situation. We are in dark days, days that could have been better prepared for had this government not ignored the warnings, not only from members on this side of the House, but the general public. The car dealers are in trouble, the auto sector is in trouble, manufacturing is in trouble.

The fact is that under this government's watch, Ontario has the highest taxation on new business investment in Canada. This government's own Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress reported that Ontario has the second-highest taxes on new business investment in the developed world.

Just to add insult to injury, Ontario also has one of the highest personal income tax rates in the country, obviously creating a major disincentive for talented people to stay here or to work here or to raise a family or to buy a car or to buy a refrigerator.

We do know that since 2002, the government of Ontario has slid back into some of those bad old self-destructive habits. Massive increases in public spending and the return of high taxes are now dragging Ontario down and risking the economic future of our province. The recent declaration of our have-not status is the culmination of—

Mr. John O'Toole: A five-year—

Mr. Toby Barrett: —a five-year decline. You took the words right out of my mouth.

This announcement proves that Ontario isn't just on the edge of a fiscal and economic crisis. We've essentially crawled into the hole—or whatever expression you want to use. We've gone over the cliff, we've hit the wall, and we've hit that wall head-on. I won't think of the make of car that we were driving. But as we have hit that wall—or are about to hit that wall—take a look around, because your family is in the car with you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I guess nobody from the Liberal side wants to speak on this pre-budget debate, so I rise to speak in the House today in support of the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook's motion to establish a real democratic pre-budget consultation process.

It's no wonder that the McGuinty government wants to limit public input on the impact of their policies—or more to the point, the lack of their policies—on taxpayers across this province. It's obvious that this McGuinty government does not want to face the citizens whom they have displaced in the job market through their inability to properly manage our economy.

In his amendment, the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook has suggested several communities that should be heard from during the pre-budget consultation process. These communities have been exceptionally hard hit, and I believe it's time for this McGuinty government to face the music and sit across from these folks to hear first-hand their experiences and the hardships that they and their families are facing. These are hard-working Ontarians, and they have to endure this.

If the McGuinty government will not listen, perhaps they have to listen to the thousands of workers who are on the brink of financial ruin and are looking for this government to create that positive economic climate—not to sit cloistered in their offices, and bring in new regulation after new regulation.

I will go through the list of the cities that my colleague has suggested and remind this government, and put on record the reality that they are afraid to face. This is a quote from the Toronto Star regarding the Brampton community:

"Political leaders in Queen's Park say there's little they can do to help struggling Canadian automakers adjust to a changing North American market, despite the loss, announced yesterday, of more than 1,100 high-paying Chrysler production jobs at its Brampton plant.

"Many of these laid-off workers will receive buyout or early retirement packages, or receive enhanced unemployment insurance benefits while they" try to "look for other jobs."

Well, Premier, perhaps these laid-off workers are not as enamoured as you are with your skills retraining program, and you simply prefer not to deal with that point. Well, that's fine.

Let's move on to another community—a community like Brantford. According to the Brantford Expositor:

"The Family Counselling Centre of Brant has received requests from over 1,900 people this year, despite budgeting for only 600.

"They expect to serve more than 2,500 by the end of January 2009.

"The number of people seeking help through the agency has increased fourfold since last year, and much of the increase is directly related" to the job loss in the manufacturing industry and the cutbacks.

"The 'suddenness of a layoff' not only creates an immediate income crisis for individuals and families, but"—as you know—"also results in stresses and strains on the personal and family relationships."

We are not just talking about dollars and cents here; we're talking about lives. We're talking about people's lives and the stress placed on families when the breadwinner isn't working. Premier, this government needs to be reminded continuously of the human face behind the economic downturn. Perhaps at some point these real stories will begin to chip at this government's armour.

1610

Let's talk about Cambridge. A once-prosperous community has witnessed 1,650 jobs disappear as three local plants shut their doors. In addition to that, over 570 workers have been laid off, with little hope of being called back. Their only hope rests with the McGuinty government focusing their efforts on creating a positive investment-friendly province by developing and acting on a realistic plan. As you can see by the regulatory bills running through this Legislature, they are not focused on that end goal.

Let's talk about Chatham. Chatham would also greatly appreciate a visit from representatives of the Ontario government so that their concerns can be addressed. A quote, "Southwestern Ontario was hit with more bad news ... when hundreds of employees at the Navistar truck plant in Chatham were handed layoff notices.... Some 525 workers are already on indefinite layoff after one shift was cut in April because of falling sales." How much heads-up to you need? Where are these workers expected to go for support? What planning process does the McGuinty government have in place to give these workers a modicum of hope as we enter the holiday season?

Hold on to your seats, because the citizens of Cornwall also have a story to tell. Satisfied Brake Products laid off 180 people. Advantech Advanced Manufacturing Services laid off 27 people because Ontario is no longer a competitive place to do business. Domtar pulp and paper mill has closed, leaving 310 workers and their families with no hope of being called back. Morbern Inc., manufacturers of vinyl upholstery, has laid off more than 78 workers. Minister Papatello is globe-trotting. Are any of these workers looking forward to jobs right here in Ontario as a result of that globe-trotting?

In a moment I'm going to be moving an adjournment of the debate. I'm going to be doing so for the following

reasons. A motion was passed from the House by all parties on December 8, 2005, calling for a detailed government initiative to come forward immediately to deal with local economic crises affecting such communities as Cornwall, Oshawa, Collingwood, Thunder Bay, Windsor, St. Catharines and smaller rural communities. When the McGuinty government failed to act on this motion, another similar motion was brought forward by the official opposition on May 29, 2007, calling once again on the McGuinty Liberals to bring forward a comprehensive jobs plan to spur job creation throughout the province in general and in the manufacturing sector in particular. On October 21, 2008, the McGuinty Liberals voted down a motion from the official opposition calling for a select committee on the Ontario economy to consider and report on options to address the challenges faced by Ontario families and businesses in the province's current weakened economy.

The McGuinty Liberals have failed to give all members in this House the opportunity to speak in a debate they themselves initiated on the economy on October 7, 2008. The motion and the amendments from our party and the NDP that are the subject of this debate have yet to be called again for further debate and yet to be voted upon. Ontario's finance minister said in the House on October 21, 2008, that the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs is "an opportunity" to deal with the economic challenges facing the province.

I therefore move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1615 to 1645.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mrs. Savoline has moved the adjournment of the debate. All those in favour of the motion will please rise together and be counted by the table.

You can take your seats.

All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing while you are counted by the table staff.

I think you may take your seats.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 7; the nays are 35.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

I return to the member for Burlington, who continues to have the floor.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I cannot even begin to imagine the impact on the quiet and proud communities like Guelph, which has been exceptionally hard hit by the McGuinty government inaction. Linamar Corp. laid off 800 workers because of serious economic circumstances, none of which this government lifted a finger to assist with. The Collins and Aikman plant closed in Guelph, leaving 510 workers behind. The Better Beef food pro-

cessing plant laid off 360 workers from their operation. ABB, a manufacturer of small power transformers and repairer of large transformers, moved their operation to greener pastures and left 280 people wondering where their next paycheque would be coming from. Imperial Tobacco closed up shop and left 550 people wondering why they suddenly moved to Mexico. Sleeman has laid off 80 workers, a company with a solid foothold in the beer market. W.C. Wood closed one of its shops in Guelph, resulting in 200 taxpayers that are now out of work. Genesta Inc. and Dana Corp. shut their operations down, totalling more than 65 workers, while GeoScience Corp. laid off yet another 100 workers.

The job losses in the Guelph community are substantial. The loss of this revenue will not only hit the families of the workers themselves, but it also will hit the businesses that the families patronized.

What this government fails to remember is that the quality of life in our community is not based on our residential property taxes; it's based on our industrial and commercial property taxes. Once you succeed, Premier, in driving that core industry away, it will not be long before our quality of life begins to erode. There will be a ripple effect throughout entire communities. Once lost, it's extremely difficult to regain that.

In Hamilton, close to 2,000 jobs have been terminated as their employers went in search of greener pastures yet again. They have settled in the United States and Mexico, where labour is cheaper. But they have also moved out west; they've moved out east to the provinces that have lowered their taxes to attract investment—basically landing anywhere but here in Ontario.

I wonder if the Premier has a plan to bring these folks back. Not all of the plant closures can be blamed on the United States and the world economy. In tough times, if you want to keep people working, keep the economy moving, you need to offer companies a reason to stay. The McGuinty government wouldn't even have to bring in sweeping corporate tax cuts, although they should. No, all they really need to do is repeal the single largest tax increase in the province of Ontario, the precious health tax, to cut employers a break during these tough times. In fact, if the McGuinty government were really intent on saving jobs in the province of Ontario, they could make an order in council in cabinet tomorrow afternoon. It really is that easy.

Platitudes and hand-wringing will not get us out of this economic situation that we're in. Just wishing for a better economy for tomorrow and begging other levels of government for help will not make it so either.

The McGuinty government needs to face facts now. They need to face the people whose lives they have destroyed through their inaction. They need to hear from the very people who are experiencing what is happening to them. They have left these people to flounder, and they need to take action now to help these folks. Bringing the prebudget consultations to these communities will be a very good start, and hopefully after that the McGuinty government will create a meaningful plan to help communities get back to work.

I am moving adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be another 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1652 to 1722.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those in favour of the motion will please rise together to be counted by the table.

You may take your seats.

All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing while being counted by the table.

Take your seats.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 9; the nays are 31.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

The member for Burlington has the floor, and I recognize the member for Burlington.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise to once again support my colleague from Niagara West—Glanbrook in his attempt to put forward the communities that need to be communicated with in this round of hearings. The economy has hit so many families in such a devastating way that I think the least this government can do is recognize the fact that these communities should have a chance to speak.

The reason I have put forward these motions this afternoon is that I am quite amazed that there aren't any members on the government side who wish to speak to the amendment. They have just shut down—the arrogance with which they are approaching this issue and snubbing Ontarians.

The reason I have put forward the motion to adjourn debate and the motion to adjourn the House is to let the people of Ontario know that this government is playing games with their lives, with the way in which their communities are suffering under the non-action of the McGuinty Liberals. Not only do they not act; they don't choose to stand up in the House and speak to important issues. So I wanted to get on the record that this game that the McGuinty government is playing does not wash on me and it does not wash on the residents in my community and certainly, certainly not on Ontarians. It will be obvious in the next few months how little this government is doing to help Ontarians out of this very, very tough economic time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I ask that the question be now put.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 48, it is a decision of the Speaker to determine whether or not this motion should be allowed, based on a number of considerations, including whether

or not allowing such a motion would be an infringement upon the rights of the minority.

I believe that allowing this motion at this time, after six hours of debate, would in fact be an infringement on the rights of the majority.

Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to commend the Speaker for standing up for democracy. That is fundamentally what this debate is really about.

I would put to you that the debate yesterday, and I have a copy of that debate, trying to get the Liberal government to go to the people of Ontario during this time of economic crisis in the province—show some leadership.

Our leader, John Tory, suggested months ago that we have a sectoral discussion on the economy. They failed to listen, and they're really trying to skate through, to get to Christmas, have a few Christmas carols, a bit of eggnog and go to sleep. What they really want is for the people of Ontario to ignore the inevitable.

This is a time for the government and the opposition to work together for the betterment of Ontario and the economy. In difficult times, families pull together.

I would say that I am disappointed. The member from Pickering—Scarborough East should know, having served as the mayor of Pickering, and being a person I had some respect for when he was in the municipal level of government, but he's gone to the dark side now, unfortunately. In fact, I would say that he would know full well how important the auto and manufacturing sector is generally in the region of Durham. He knows full well how important it is not just to Pickering but to all the municipalities within the region of Durham.

1730

Arguably, when I listened to and looked at the debate yesterday—in Hansard, it's quite clear there on page 4168, for those who want to follow along. It's sort of like a songbook. This is actually Mr. Arthurs speaking yesterday to this original motion; I should say to you that we're continuing an amendment moved by Mr. Hudak. That's what this debate is about: that the government motion be amended by striking out "during the week of December 15, 2008," and replacing it with the following—they wanted to have one week of discussions as a concession. Shame. They were just going to shut it down before Christmas, drink the eggnog and go to sleep.

What we want is this: During the months of January and February 2009, when the Legislature is not sitting and members are available—we're on full alert on this side—rather than rushing the prebudget hearings through under the cover of Christmas and the holiday season, we want to visit the following 19 vulnerable communities, among the hardest hit by the downturn in Ontario's economy. What we want to do is talk to the people in the communities. We've listed those communities. They are Brampton; Brantford; Cambridge; I think of the member from Cambridge, who has spoken here frequently.

Chatham: The member from Chatham knows the industry that has been affected and the auto-related business.

Cornwall: Cornwall has been on the radar screen here for months and is devastated.

Guelph: The member from Guelph should speak up; she should be on our side on this. Break from the force of the whip and join us in our reaching out to the people of Ontario, to hear the voices of the families who during Christmas are going to be saying, "Where is the next paycheque?" This is Dalton McGuinty's Christmas, and he's trying to pull the potato-in-the-stocking trick, I think it is.

Ingersoll; Kitchener—Waterloo. The Speaker would know about that. Lindsay; London, Ontario; Oakville.

Oshawa, the area that I am closely associated with.

Owen Sound; Smiths Falls; St. Catharines: The Minister of Transportation should be here, voting with us to extend these hearings.

We're not asking for something that's impossible. Members are elected to serve their constituents first, and in that, we're outlining the 19 hardest-hit communities that we want to visit and listen to. We're not asking to in any way restrict the force of Dalton McGuinty and Dwight Duncan, the Minister of Finance. The city of Windsor has the highest unemployment in Canada, and he wants to shut this down. He's not doing his job. He may be doing his job as Minister of Finance—the Premier is telling him what to do, clearly.

My point, though, is when I listened to the remarks yesterday—and I'll get back to this—the minister has had closed-door hearings, not just trying-to-get-the-lay-of-the-land kind of information, meeting with sectoral groups. This is Mr. Arthurs speaking yesterday: "We heard from the Colleges of Ontario." What have they done?

When you think of the Colleges of Ontario, you'd have to ask the expert in our area, Peter Shurman, the member from Thornhill, who has been the only voice that I've heard for the students at York University who could be losing their academic year. Our job is to listen to our constituents. The young people of Ontario are being ignored. We see that in Bill 126, where they're targeting young people and the graduated licensing. These are people in rural Ontario who will no longer be able to even get to school or their after-school jobs.

Here's what Mr. Arthurs said—I'm just reading from Hansard here, because it's easier than preparing notes: "We had a presentation a week ago, Thursday, from the Association of International Automobile Manufacturers of Canada—AIAMC. This is a familiar group." Well, this isn't a familiar group to me. AIAMC represents the Hondas and the Toyotas.

The Premier and, I think, the other member from Windsor, Ms. Pupatello, are travelling the world—not in business class, I hope. If they're in business class, that's almost as bad as the president of GM showing up in front of the Senate in the United States, or Congress, with a Learjet. I would say that we've got to put these things in perspective. Travelling around the world—what exactly is she doing? I'd like a report. That would be a fine time for her to present to the committee. She can appear here

or in Windsor, wherever. We wouldn't want her to have to drive to Toronto in the winter. She might be in Windsor. She could be in Florida. Who knows? But the fact is, she could even be in Italy, calling it business, but in the meantime her community is suffering. She's the minister of economic development, and she's not to be found.

This organization is not the Big Three as we've referred to in Detroit. I should disclose here that, in reality, I worked for General Motors for 31 years and I have much to be thankful for. This is a company that I think, at the end of all of this, will emerge representing the North American auto market. I think there is a role for the government. I think there's a role for the federal government and certainly a role for the provincial government. But I don't know what Premier McGuinty's plan is. We could be hearing from those communities during the days of the hearings that I'm talking about, from the auto producers, the auto sector side, from Chatham. The member from Chatham is over there chatting, and I'm sort of thinking—the member from Essex, pardon me; it used to be Chatham-Kent. That's Mr. Hoy, actually. My point here is, though, what's wrong with just listening to those communities? Is it too much to ask?

We want to move that motion to add those 19 communities, to sit during January and February and allow the committee to put together a significant report in these difficult economic times. That report can be non-partisan. We could have a unanimous consent report. I've been on that committee for 10 years. They can do good work. I know they could do good work. I hope that Mr. Arthurs is going to be in the country, but if not, his other parliamentary assistant could certainly take the lead there. I would suspect that we would want all members to participate, not just the select members of that committee. All members of those 19 communities would be able to participate and represent their constituents as well as they could.

I can only say that, in conclusion, in my riding this is a very, very important issue. It would be irresponsible of me not to speak today and demand for them to be able to speak tomorrow. That's what this debate is about, listening to and allowing the voices of the people of Ontario in these tough economic times to be heard—if nothing else, a platform for them to make their points, whether it's business, labour, people who are currently unemployed or students themselves. This is the time for the people of Ontario to be heard. In these difficult economic times at this time of year, a better gesture or gift I couldn't think of.

So, with that in mind, I would move adjournment of the debate because I hear nothing, not even a snarl, from the government members who are here. So I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. O'Toole has moved the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be another 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1739 to 1809.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those in favour of the motion will please rise.

Take your seats.

All those opposed will please rise.

You may take your seats.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 2; the nays are 29.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

It being past 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1810.

ERRATUM

No.	Page	Column	Line(s)	Should read:
92	4155	1	2	Two good friends in my riding in Ottawa Centre, Dilip

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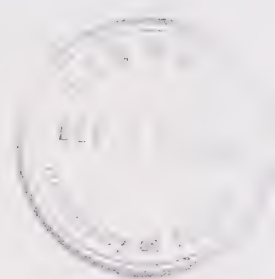
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of Debates
(Hansard)****Journal
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(Hansard)****Wednesday 26 November 2008****Mercredi 26 novembre 2008**Speaker
Honourable Steve PetersPrésident
L'honorable Steve PetersClerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 26 November 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 26 novembre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

TEMPERATURE IN CHAMBER

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I will remind the members that it wasn't too long ago in this chamber that they were complaining that it was too cold. I recognize as well that it is a little warm in here. I thought it might be good for you if we turn the heat up a bit, so you can understand what it's like to sit in the hot seat up here. But there are some technical difficulties, and the staff are working to lower the temperature in here. Perhaps, because of that, everyone can do their part in lowering the temperature here and making for a good, quiet question period today.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL

Mr. Fonseca moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 119, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I'm pleased to rise and speak again on the McGuinty government's proposed amendments to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997. This bill, if passed, will be good for our province's construction industry; it will be good for our province's construction workers; and it will help us fight the underground economy. This is the right time to help those construction employers who play by the rules and pay their fair share by contributing to Ontario's workplace safety and insurance system. At the same time, we have

proposed a responsible and realistic implementation timeline that will allow stakeholders and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board the opportunity to discuss implementation and ensure that it is successful.

Our proposed bill would extend mandatory workers' compensation coverage to independent operators, sole proprietors and partners in a partnership. These individuals are not currently required to purchase Workplace Safety and Insurance Board coverage. Due to the transient nature of the construction industry and the difficulty of determining on-site who is eligible for an exemption from WSIB coverage, there has been abuse of the current exemptions by certain individuals and companies wishing to gain a competitive advantage. We cannot allow this to continue. These practices undermine contractors by creating an unlevel playing field and contribute to underfunding of the WSIB system. These practices also undermine health and safety standards on construction sites.

The government has listened and has amended Bill 119 to address the concerns of small companies with one partner or an executive officer in an office. If the legislation passes, the amendment to Bill 119 will allow the government to create a regulation to exempt an individual executive officer or partner who works exclusively in the office. The government will work with business and labour groups before putting forward a regulation to ensure it meets the overall goals of the legislation.

By proposing our bill, we are helping legitimate construction employers be competitive in this marketplace when bidding on construction jobs. They need and deserve the help of government. Our system of mandatory coverage will help us ensure that independent operators subject to this bill are registering within the WSIB system. This connection to the workers' compensation system, in conjunction with other programs such as the Canada Revenue Agency, will help to identify those who may be working in the underground economy.

If the proposed amendments are passed, they would only fully come into effect no earlier than 2012. This three-year implementation period would also allow business to properly understand and prepare for the new rules.

Stakeholders from the construction industry have been advocating for mandatory coverage in the construction sector for over 15 years. The stakeholders include the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario, LIUNA, the Council of Ontario Construction Associations, the Residential Construction Council of Central Ontario, the Ontario General Contractors Associ-

ation, the Ontario Road Builders' Association, the Interior Systems Contractors Association, the Mechanical Contractors Association of Ontario and many, many others. The legislation is before us because of their relentless efforts to bring attention to this issue for the goal of levelling the playing field for all employers and improving the overall health of the construction sector. I sincerely thank everyone who has worked so hard to bring this legislation forward and for their long-standing advocacy on this very important issue.

This legislation will help the construction sector and those working within it in many ways. One of the most important things it will do is to provide a needed financial safety net for individuals and their families who might otherwise be unprotected. Once again, I will draw attention to the stories that I and my colleagues in this House have heard, many of them in our constituency offices, of some independent operators in construction who have unfortunately been injured on the job and did not have insurance coverage and now find themselves without assistance.

Every year, there are examples of serious injuries and fatalities that cause financial and emotional hardships to families following serious workplace incidents, where the self-employed individual dies without WSIB coverage. One example that comes to mind is an individual involved in construction who left behind a spouse and children. He died from a fall, but did not have the optional WSIB coverage. That means his spouse and children were not entitled to the lump sum benefits and reimbursement for burial expenses they would have received from the WSIB during that very difficult time.

0910

The spouse and young children also did not receive the monthly benefits they would have been entitled to and some of the additional programs the WSIB offers, such as bereavement counselling and labour market re-entry services for the spouse. Had this individual been covered under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, compensation for the children would be included in the monthly benefits. These benefits continue until the children have completed their education, including post-secondary. Insurance may cost money, we all know this, but it provides security and peace of mind.

Just as importantly, this bill will help us prevent injuries and make this province's workplaces safer. Once in the WSIB system, injuries are more likely to be reported, which will help both the WSIB and the Ministry of Labour track unsafe work sites and workplace practices within the construction industry. This will help us monitor our province's workplaces so we can better direct safety efforts and enforce our laws where these efforts will be best put to use.

Again, I emphasize that this bill will provide a level playing field for the many legitimate operators within the construction sector. Underground economic practices in construction threaten health and safety, undermine labour standards and erode construction quality. Establishing a mandatory coverage system would help level the playing

field for law-abiding construction companies that comply with their WSIB and other legislative requirements. We need to support the majority of legitimate construction companies that are playing by the rules, and this proposed legislation will do just that.

The proposal would also help reduce incidences of revenue leakage for the WSIB, where benefits are paid to individuals for whom no WSIB premiums have been paid by the principal or the employer. The Council of Ontario Construction Associations estimates that 61% of the industry is paying for 100% of the claims made at the WSIB. This has impacts on WSIB premiums for those 61% who are paying, and it is simply not fair.

How would you feel if the same was true for you about your auto insurance? I am sure, like they have, you would demand change. This bill is simply the right thing for government to do. It will reduce underground economic activity; it will level the playing field; and it will improve workplace health and safety in the construction sector.

Think about it. Many of us drove in this morning. Can you imagine if you were paying auto insurance and you knew that only 60% of those cars out there on the road next to you were paying auto insurance while the others were all being covered by your premiums? That would be so unfair; the outrage we would hear from all citizens across this great province of ours—rightfully so. That's what has happened in construction, where 61% have been paying for 100% of the claims.

This proposed legislation will level that playing field; will make sure that everybody is playing by the same rules; that we are helping those good companies, those companies which are the vast majority. But there are some out there, some bad actors, and we want to shut them down. We want to make sure that their employees are covered; that they're not using some of the nefarious practices that we've heard out there where they are misclassifying their employees, saying they're independent operators when they're truly not; they've been with that company, some for many years, and have been working as independent operators so that they wouldn't pay the premiums. But when one of those workers is injured, who has to pay? Those legitimate operators. Those that have been paying all along—very unfair—creating revenue leakage for the WSIB—a system that has been in place for close to 100 years here in the province of Ontario, and it has been there for 100 years because it works. It's working for employers, it's working for labour and it's working for employees. It allows for a safety net within the construction sector so that when those employees are out there, sometimes on very high-risk jobs on top of a roof, or out there on the road as they're working on our highways, or building our hospitals and our schools, we know that if they were injured they would be covered. Their families would also be taken care of, as I mentioned in that one personal story.

It also puts some onus on the industry so that they understand that there is a cost when somebody gets injured. There are premiums that are being paid out.

When there are less injuries those premiums can come down. When everybody is paying, they're all in the same boat and they will work to help to build a healthier and safer workplace. That's what we're doing in the Ministry of Labour.

From 2004 to 2008, we had a program with our inspectors as they were going out into the field. They were working with companies with a targeted compliance initiative, making sure that they looked at the highest-risk types of businesses and industry so that they could lower the lost-time injury rate within business. What they've done is, they've had a lot of success. We have seen an over 20% reduction in lost-time injury claims overall in Ontario. We now have a new program within the Ministry of Labour. It's called Safe at Work Ontario. It too goes into all different work sites, but it will also go into construction work sites and work with businesses in terms of building a culture of health and safety, making sure that we work with employers so they can understand that when you invest in your people, when you invest in health and safety, you're also helping your bottom line. But they want to make sure, when they're making those investments in safety, that everybody is also doing the same. We're all in the same boat. That's when we want to bring everybody into the WSIB who works within the construction sector.

You see, this is a sector that has some very unique characteristics to it. There is a lot of mobility within the sector. Construction workers may work on three different sites in a week, and would have worked on many different projects. One day they may be working on the QEW for the Ministry of Transportation as they're moving on one of those initiatives; the next day for the Ministry of Health as they're building one of our hospitals; or they're constructing the homes within our community or the community centres, things we need that help us with our quality of life.

Because of those unique characteristics, it has sometimes been difficult to bring everybody into the WSIB system. What this proposed legislation will do is allow for the industry to close many of the loopholes that have been out there. I spoke about the misclassification of workers. There's also the underreporting of payroll or the number of individuals that you have in your company, where some have reported that they've only got three individuals in the company and they say that they are covered, but the truth of the matter is that they may have 10. So if any one of the 10 gets injured, they say it's one of the three they're reporting, so they'll get benefits.

0920 This is completely unfair. As you know, 70% of their payroll is not paying premiums that help the entire system. Because of that revenue leakage and because of what we've also seen within the underground economy in construction, there is a lot of lost revenue to all levels of government. That lost revenue has been estimated by the Ontario Construction Secretariat at approximately \$2 billion—wow, \$2 billion. What we could do with that: hospitals, schools, roads, community centres. Those

dollars for infrastructure would help all Ontarians, and we want to make sure those dollars are there to help all Ontarians.

With this proposed legislation, we're not only leveling the playing field and bringing fairness into the construction sector, but we're making sure that those who work in the sector are more safe and have benefits if they do get injured. We don't want to hear about the independent operator who didn't have insurance getting injured and finding himself in a bad state and looking at a life—10, 20, 30 or whatever years he has—here in Ontario with a lot of hardship. We don't want that hardship on those construction workers. I know they don't want it.

Sometimes we look at only the short term and think, "Do you know what? I don't really want to pay out those funds." But we don't know what's around the corner. I don't know what may happen if I get into my car on the weekend; there may be an accident. We want to make sure that I'm covered, and also that if something happened to somebody in the neighbourhood, they would be able to recoup funds, to have funds, to have that insurance in place. As I said, if this was something around auto insurance and we knew that only 60% of those on the road were paying for 100% of the claims, there would be outrage.

I know that many in the general public may not understand the inside baseball of this particular issue, but it's about protecting those who are doing a lot for the general public, building the schools and our homes and doing work in the community. When we see those workers up on a roof, we want to make sure that they aren't injured, that safety practices are in place and that employers are looking at best practices.

Within those best practices, we have some amazing health and safety associations here in the province of Ontario. They are there to work in partnership, work together with employers, labour and employees, so that we won't have as many injuries and we will take care of our employees. Once again, this proposed legislation is based on the values of fairness and safety.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm standing here actually as a form of protest, Mr. Speaker, because as you would know, this motion is being rammed through under time allocation, which prevents the members of the Legislature from representing their constituents fairly on an important issue. I can tell you for sure that the member from Cambridge, who is here today, as well as the member from Wellington-Halton Hills are unable to present the views of their constituents. How disappointing. How shameful.

In fact, the minister said in his remarks, which were prepared for him, written by the ministry staff—he read them quite well, but the passion wasn't there. He has been told what to do by the Premier, and he read the speech rather succinctly. Unfortunately, he said, insurance may cost money. Let's be clear: That's the theme here this morning. This is a tax grab. Let's be clear. It's

\$11,000 for the small construction employer. It'll be the one- and two-man, mom-and-pop shop paying \$11,000 of additional tax.

Why are they paying the tax? Because the WSIB, the government-run insurance agency to protect workers, is in a huge deficit. Why, I would put to you, is because there's no plan to fund it properly and this is a method of reaching into someone else's pockets and taking out \$11,000 to have more consultation and more dinner parties for the board of the WSIB.

I don't think it does what it's intended to do. The minister also said, "will improve health and safety in the workplace." Now, how does this actually improve the functionality of trades? How is this actually going to make employers, who are now paying another \$11,000 per employer, safer? In fact, it arguably might make it less safe because now they don't have the money for the harnesses, the slings and the tie-off ropes because they're paying so much for these premiums. But it also implies, falsely I might say, that the independent operators don't have insurance, which is completely a misrepresentation of what is the fact. They have liability insurance, if they're at all clever—some may not. Many constituents of mine told me—law-abiding, tax-paying, hard-working citizens and family members—this will drive some of them even further underground. So it won't achieve the goals and the laudable objectives that the minister says. It's clearly an issue that we don't support.

Our member, Bob Bailey, who represents the riding of Sarnia-Lambton, has done a remarkable job of trying to hold the minister's wiggling feet to the fire, but he squirmed out of this with a time allocation motion. They limited debate in committee; it was only because the bill was poorly drafted that they even let it go to committee. They had to go there to get it amended because of the faulty workmanship in the legislation's drafting. Now the minister has brought it back here, time allocated, so no one can speak out. I've been given a minimum of 20 minutes. That's barely enough time to introduce yourself in this place.

But I think that, if I look at it, 61% of the people already pay. Well, I'm going to read an article—Mr. Speaker, through you, with your indulgence as well, I'm going to read an article or some parts of it from the media this morning, November 26. It's in our package and I encourage members to refer to that. What does it say here?

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's actually in the National Post. It's slanted towards business. If it was in the Toronto Star, the Liberals would read it, because it basically—

Interjection: They would write it, never mind read it.

Mr. John O'Toole: They would have written it, quite frankly, but I want to stay serious. This is by Ray Penning, a director of research for Cardus, the Hamilton-based think-tank, who will address Ontario's construction costs before the economic club today. This is an expert; we can qualify that. It's not me. What he's saying here: "Imagine it is 1978, the year Ontario's current construc-

tion labour framework was passed into law. You are an investor intending to build a major project such as a factory or power plant," which indeed we are; we intend or hope that Premier McGuinty will have a power plant built in my riding of Durham next to the Darlington generating station, so this is a real story then.

"No matter where you choose to invest in Canada, the only workforce that has the skills and capacity to complete your project is the one organized by the craft unions affiliated with the various provincial building and construction trades councils." There you have it. "You could receive competitive bids for your project, but all of those bids will be based on the same labour agreement, negotiated between employers as a group and their unions"—the one big union, the OBU.

"It's a complicated and messy history but if we fast-forward 30 years, that situation has changed dramatically. In British Columbia and Alberta (and to some extent other provinces), major projects are receiving bids from open-shop non-union contractors, alternative unions and the traditional craft unions."

0930

I'm going to intervene here for a minute. The point here is to imply that the only person qualified is one who belongs to a union. If someone has a skill—an artist, an actor, a musician, an electrician, a plumber, a welder, a lawyer—yes, they need to apply and comply with standards, whether it's in a profession or in an art form. But it doesn't qualify them just because they belong to an organization, so it's wrong to assume that they're the only qualified people because they belong to a craft union. I'm not criticizing. There's a place for all of us in this world.

It goes on here and says: "There are no known studies that measure the correlation between these competitive labour pool environments and the comparative economic prosperity enjoyed by those provinces in recent years, but anecdotal evidence and logic both suggest a strong link between competitive bidding and broad economic success.

"Ironically, while all this was going on, Ontario was heading in the opposite direction," and has been since around 2003. Someone argued before that we were off the road for 10 years.

"Working agreements among municipalities, school boards and many corporate investors prevented"—this is a key word—"contractors without labour agreements with craft unions from even bidding on projects." That's why it's costing more to do business. That's a tax. That's my premise here, and that's the thrust of my argument.

It says that the competition is suppressed, and now Ontario is "a 'have-not' province almost completely out of step with the country's fastest-growing provinces when it comes to the organization of construction labour.

"This tale of two economic directions took place due to changes...." I want to put this in a broader context. I read a book recently; it's called *The World Is Flat*. It's about globalization, it's about competitiveness, it's about our youth and how we will compete in a global economy.

We're looking today at the auto sector. I put to you, in a broader section, this is just one piece of a many-legged animal here in Ontario.

The Liberals' plan is to tax anything that moves. In fact, there was a competitiveness report as well. These are not things that I'm making up. All of us are required to do a certain amount of reading here, and they make it easy for us, because they give us these clippings which—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Who's they?

Mr. John O'Toole: This is the civil servants, the staff here, who are great people. They come in here—I think unnecessarily, because of the way these corporate hours work.

Now, they just had a report filed yesterday by a group of academic experts and practical experts, well-known and well-respected—and I give the Premier his due. He has a very illustrious advisory group, which costs millions of dollars, by the way. They tabled a report yesterday. Here's the headline. This is from another famous Toronto paper. It says: "Grits"—that's the Liberals—"Stomp Own Task Force's Rescue Plan."

Interjection: What a waste of money.

Mr. John O'Toole: I know. They spent a million dollars. They bought this advice from these experts on the panel. What do they do? They stomped on it. What did it say? This is exactly what this discussion is about. This is about Ontario doing the right thing at the right time for the right reason. What they're doing is the wrong thing at the wrong time for the wrong reasons. They got it completely wrong. They're off the tracks. They're out of control.

Well, I'm partially out of control here, a bit, but I'll bring it back here.

"The Ontario government rejected key recommendations proposed by its own task force yesterday to stimulate the province's sagging economy, including a call to harmonize provincial and federal sales taxes."

Again, I want to expose this for what it is: Whatever moves is going to get taxed. They've increased spending by about 30% and revenue by about 29%, and now revenue is going to go down because of the recession globally, and they're going to blame—here's the plan. Why is Premier McGuinty not dealing with the auto sector crisis when Ontario is the only province in Canada that is dependent almost exclusively on manufacturing, and more specifically the auto sector? Here's the plan: He's going to wait until Stephen Harper announces it, whenever that is going to be announced, possibly tomorrow. Stephen Harper is going to announce something, and Premier McGuinty is going to stand up and say it's too little, too late, too soon, too early, not enough—

Interjection: The blame game.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's all a game when, in fact, the Prime Minister has fishing communities on the east coast and forestry communities on the west coast—they're even cancelling the opera in BC.

The issue here is that the Prime Minister has a large family of provinces and territories to take care of and to address, and has, I would say, really responded in a com-

passionate way. He has indicated, despite the Conservative tendency not to have a deficit, that he is going to look after the people of Ontario and make the key investments. But what's happening here is, Ontario is waiting to blame Prime Minister Harper.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm telling you, I know how it works. After 15 years, they're going to blame it on somebody else.

This is what they are doing, though, and this report that I'm referring to says it very clearly. They gave them recommendations which he trashed. Here's the irony. If you read this with any conscience and any intuitive understanding of the economy, here's the deal: The Premier, I don't think—I say this with the greatest respect—gets it, or if he does, he's putting a barrier in front of the people of Ontario doing the right things. Here's what he's saying, which is completely wrong—and I'm saying it as a person who doesn't have as much education as he does, except the education of practical experience: "Cutting corporate taxes will create more ... trouble by starving the ... treasury of much-needed revenue." Corporations don't pay tax when they're not making profits—and we're in an economic collapse. Do you think General Motors, Chrysler, Stelco, Inco, Dofasco, any of them, are making money? No, they're losing money. That's why their shares are going down. That's why they're cancelling the dividend cheque. And why? Because he doesn't get it. I'm serious. I'm saying it as a humble opposition member. I think he does, though, and he's simply failing to do the right thing. He's doing the popular thing.

Even the remarks by the minister this morning remind me of that argument that insurance may cost money. That's the slippery slope. In other words, "Prepare to batten down the hatches. We're going to increase your taxes." That's what he's saying. It's code language.

I can only say to you that I'm passionate about this because I worked in this sector for years. I know there's an important purpose here, to protect workers, and employers should have choices in that. This is a managed, dictated program for all of the construction trades groups, and it's payback time for the Working Families Coalition, and I want to—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member, take a seat. I'd like him to withdraw that comment.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'll certainly withdraw that, Speaker, with due respect.

Personally, I wanted to say that I know there are others here who wanted to speak. The member from Cambridge and the member from Wellington-Halton Hills did want to speak. Time allocation has disallowed that, so I am going to make the generous gesture to give up the rest of my time to the member from York-Simcoe.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: I rise today to talk on this Bill 119. I just want to give you a little history on the progression of this bill. In principle, we agree with the bill but we have a lot of problems with the bill. We brought forward 19 amendments in committee and not one of those amend-

ments was dealt with and addressed properly. I had great concerns. The four in particular that bothered me were sections 8, 10, 19 and 27. I'd like to take a little time and talk about 19.

Having spent a good part of my life in heavy industry and in the trades, I think I can speak from a position of experience. The one that really got me, that the government wouldn't deal with, was the intimidation and coercion section that we brought forward. Why I say that is because the minister stood up and talked about how this bill will enhance safety and health in the workplace.

I'm going to give you a personal view of what happened to me in the steel industry. There is a part of the steel plant called the coke ovens. They're vertical furnaces, which heat the coal into coke, and they have what they call a pusher car, which pushes the coal into quenching cars on the other side of the ovens. Then they go to the quenching station to be cooled and on to the blast furnace. On what they call the bench, on one side of the ovens, they have the pusher car, a 50-tonne car that has a big arm that pushes the coke into the cars. There is no way to get off that bench if you are on a man lift, which we were on because we used to go up in man lifts to repair the furnace doors or other parts of that furnace.

0940

I brought forth a health and safety concern about being trapped in a pinch point, where you couldn't get away and you could be killed. The company didn't like it. They wanted to put a safety man on the car. They wanted to have a guy with a little horn while this car was moving up and down pushing coke out of the ovens.

It got to a point where I refused to do the job. The company tried to intimidate me and threatened dismissal. All kinds of interesting things transpired. The two workers who were with me—I was the lead hand—refused to do the job too. Well, they got to them after about a week and a half by threatening to fire them. I only had one year to go to get my 30 years, so I could have been in jeopardy for my pension, but I felt that it was very unsafe and I stood up to the company. I was the only one, by myself.

They called in the Ministry of Labour. They had the company executives, there were the ministry people by phone; at the time they were on rotating strikes, and we had a group call. They listened to my side of the story, they listened to the company and they said they would have to make a decision on that. They came to some conclusions that weren't acceptable to me, but at a point where it was better than it was.

Well, lo and behold, three months later on a night shift, the driver of the pusher car fell asleep at the wheel. The 50-tonne pusher car went off the rails and smashed into the other battery of ovens. It hurt one individual seriously and tore out six ovens. There were hundreds of thousands of dollars' damage. I didn't have to say, "I told you so," because it was evident from what happened—just one incident over the years where I was threatened to be sent home by refusing to do unsafe work.

I was exposed to all kinds of carcinogens over the years, from asbestos to tar pitch volatiles, ammonia,

naphthalene—you name it; I've been exposed to it. But we finally got masks. What I'm trying to get to is that we tried to build in to the new bill the ability for workers not to be intimidated and coerced, whether by a big employer or small employer. I'd like to bring up the point that I was in a strong union environment—the United Steelworkers—and I still got attacked and intimidated. What does the poor guy do who is working for a five-man company or a smaller place? He probably would be fired and sent home.

There were several amendments that came from an experience level over the years that this government would not listen to and would not entertain. They think they know it all, but they don't. There are a lot of people out there who have a lot of valuable information and input to put into it. Ever since I have been in this House, not one amendment I have brought forward, not one bill, has been accepted by that side of the House—absolutely disgusting.

Another thing that's bothering me is the 2012 implementation day—slowly. They could have sent this out to the public. They could have had more discussion, as the official opposition has complained. They could have talked more about it. They didn't. They decided to push it through.

When you deal with a bill, as you well know, bills have parts you don't like. The government always stands up in the House and says, "You voted for it. The NDP voted for it." Well, you can't pick out certain parts of a bill and vote against those parts or cut a bill in half. You either vote for the bill or you don't. There are parts you like and parts you don't like, but you've got to vote for it one way or the other. That's unfortunate, because I do support the premise of the bill. It's moving in the right direction, but it falls short of a lot of the major things that I was concerned about.

Item 10: It's our belief that there should be no exemptions in WSIB coverage in the construction industry. With respect to the home renovation industry, there is no reason that construction workers employed in the home renovation sector should not have mandatory coverage. I'll give you an example of why they've missed the boat on this one too. It's because in home renovations you're going to see a lot more small construction companies become home renovators, and they're going to fall under that auspice so they don't have to pay the premiums. You're going to see, all of a sudden, all these new companies in Ontario that are going to change their direction, change their mandate, and this government is going to lose out on those things.

They're telling me that a guy working on a roof in an industrial site like Stelco or a guy working on a home roof—can that person not fall in both situations? But he is considered a home renovator. So I'm concerned that they have not delved into this properly; they haven't taken a really hard look at it.

I safely say, and I'm not bragging by any stretch of the imagination, that most of the members on that side have probably never worked 30 years in an industrial environment or in construction. Some may have, but most

haven't. But they're calling the shots and they don't want to listen to other people who have experience—me and many others. They think they know it all. They don't, and they won't listen. That's unfortunate, because I think you're going to see some more pitfalls in this bill and there will be more people getting around the so-called—well, the underground area they're talking about where people don't pay their premiums. I think you're going to increase them, I really do, and they'll find angles to get around it.

I agree with them as to why is this legislation necessary? Because there has been abuse in the system: no restrictions as to who can be classified as an IO; and that's another exemption—officers of the company. I don't know about anyone else in here, but on any construction sites I've seen or been involved with, owners or superintendents of those companies were telling me, no, they're not going to go there; they're going to sit in their offices. Baloney. They have trailers on-site at all these construction sites where these guys go, talk to their draftsmen, talk to their engineers, talk to their foremen, talk to their lead hands—they're there. They should be covered too.

I don't disagree that if they are only there 25% of the time maybe the premiums should be adjusted accordingly. But no, you're going to have a lot more operating officers than you had before so they can get around premiums.

Let's talk about private insurance. I asked one of the people who made a presentation in favour of private insurance, "Sir, would you think that if you put in a lot of claims your insurance would go up?" He said, "Absolutely," and I said, "And you said to me you haven't had any claims in 20 years. That's amazing. In the construction industry, it doesn't matter if you have five or 20 employees, and you've never made a claim."

Wow, that sends a strong message. That tells me that they're not reporting claims because they want to keep their premiums down. How many of those guys, 25 or 30 years later, have injuries that they received on a job and didn't claim to keep their job because they didn't want to bug their boss, and now they're walking around crippled? I can name lots of them, and I can remember the days in WSIB where even our company, Stelco, one of the biggest steel companies in Canada, would offer you—we were actually being tricked at the time. They would say, "Mr. Miller, you fell off a scaffold and you hurt your knee. Well, I'll tell you what: You come into work. We'll pay for the taxi. You come into work and you sit there and just sharpen pencils." I thought I was doing a favour to the company. I thought I was being a good employee so their claims wouldn't be put in and their rates wouldn't go up.

0950

Little did I know that I put myself in jeopardy. By not claiming anything, by not reporting my injury, 30 years later, when that nagging injury that may have happened two or three times when I was sitting sharpening pencils for the company because they didn't want me off on

WSIB—they said to me, "I'm sorry about your knee, Mr. Miller. It appears that you didn't go off; you went to work. We don't have any record of your injury." Interesting. And the minister stands up and talks about how he's going to help safety and health. I question it, because there are a lot of things that we put in that they wouldn't even entertain. So all I can say is it's going to come back to haunt them. You heard it here today. A lot of these things they're doing are not well thought out, not complete, they didn't talk to enough people—and that's what happens with bills sometimes, when you don't get all the proper sources.

A lot of our people in the union are in favour of the bill, and I agree that it will help more workers to be covered—90,000 to 130,000, to be exact. I agree with that. But they didn't go far enough. They didn't deal with these pitfalls, and these are just some from over the years that I could bring forward to show them. But once again they wouldn't listen, they don't want to hear about it, they think they've got it all figured out. Well, we'll see what happens.

In closing, I'm proud to say that in a non-partisan manner I have supported—

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller: As the member from Peterborough makes a comment—I have supported six Liberal bills to date, in my short tenure of a year and a bit. Six bills I've supported, because they were good for the people of Ontario. I believe they had good points; I supported them. Not one bill has the NDP put forward that they have supported. They've shot it down in committee; they won't even entertain it. I call that partisan, not for the people of Ontario. I call that arrogant. That's exactly what they're doing, and I'm very disappointed.

I have a few minutes left, and I will be sharing them with the member from Nickel Belt.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I want to begin the conversation today on Bill 119 with the fact that each time the minister was asked to respond to a question in the House, or certainly this morning in his comments, he talked about the importance of safety. I want to be absolutely clear in my comments that no one disputes the legitimacy of the need for safety. One of the things that I would applaud the WSIB on is the increased public awareness of the need for safety. I think the fact that they are able to put together very graphic commercials and also repeat the fact that there are no accidents—these are extremely important public messages. I know that in a case that I'm familiar with, it was an "accident" actually done by someone who was the health and safety staff person. It was a simple thing of forgetting to turn off the machine. So the training and the exposure to understanding the importance of safety and what those regulations are within the workplace that provide safety are extremely, extremely important.

I think the comments that have been made in defence of this bill have somehow glossed over the fact that no

one disputes the importance of safety. However, that's not the mechanics of the bill, if you like. We have been very clear about the fact that this is a bill that zeroes in on small business. Certainly, within the small business community there has been, I would argue, a stifled reaction but certainly a reaction. I've received e-mails from constituents and people who are struggling in an extremely complex and difficult economic environment, which I'll mention later. The cost of this is estimated to be in the neighbourhood of \$11,000 a year, in a situation where obviously many people in these businesses already have private insurance. So we have to look at, how is this being fair to those who are the targets of this piece of legislation?

I think it comes at a most inopportune moment. When we have, as a caucus, looked at the decline in manufacturing jobs and in the forestry industry over the past two years—we've been identifying that decline and challenge to the government for two years, certainly pre-dating the current climate that we find ourselves in.

I just want to say that this is the wrong group. This is a group that doesn't have the same needs, in terms of WSIB support. It's the wrong time, as Ontario is dead last in economic development. It's now a have-not province. We have fewer and fewer jobs in the province. And frankly, it's the wrong process. When I look at the way in which this bill has been brought to the House and the way in which it has been shepherded through with time allocation, without hearings beyond Toronto, with only two days of public hearings, the fact that we're forced through time allocation at this point in time and the fact that the bill isn't until 2012—it has been in a very compressed time here, with a timeline that goes beyond the next election. So I think it's really important for the people to understand that it's the wrong group, it's the wrong time, it's the wrong process.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is a privilege for me to respond to Bill 119, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, that finally addresses mandatory workers' compensation and benefits coverage for construction workers who are not presently covered. This legislation means that about 90,000 Ontario construction workers will have the privilege of being covered under WSIB.

On behalf of the NDP caucus, I certainly want to take this opportunity again to thank the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario for their advocacy on this issue for the last 15 years.

In the last 15 years, the Ontario construction industry has been substantially restructured by the practice of hiring subcontractors and independent operators. The use of independent operators has resulted in thousands of workers in the construction industry being deprived of coverage. That has created a group of employees who are entitled to claim benefits from WSIB if they get injured, but who do not have to pay premiums to the WSIB. In addition, the contractor can insist on subcontracting to firms that are portrayed as independent contractors, rather

than employing workers, as described by the WSIB, in order to gain a competitive advantage. That has shifted the whole cost of statutory payments to WSIB to a smaller and smaller group of construction workers who pay into WSIB. That has also translated into an unfair competitive advantage. You can see that if you make sure that the subcontractors that you're going to be hiring are deemed to not have to pay into WSIB, there's a saving to be made there. So two companies: one that plays fair, treats its employees as workers so that they are covered by WSIB and pays the premium; and one that looks for loopholes and makes sure that each of the subcontractors is not considered workers, doesn't have to pay into WSIB, and therefore has a competitive advantage because there are savings to be made. But those savings are made on the backs of the workers who might get injured, and this is not fair.

I cannot stand here and talk about WSIB as the be-all and end-all of it, because I've worked in the health care industry long enough to know that WSIB comes with its fair share of heartache. A lot of people who were injured on the job cannot gain access to WSIB benefits because of the loopholes you have to go through.

But there is a system in place. There are arbitrations in place so that a worker has a chance to be heard. It is sometimes cumbersome, but at the end of the day, the workers get their coverage.

People who would argue that you can get way cheaper benefits by taking out an insurance policy are—there's an argument to be made. Sure, you are probably able to pay less, but you also get less. Further, if you are denied coverage from your private insurance, there's nobody there to help you, there's nobody who knows that system except for very expensive lawyers, and then you question yourself as to why you ever went down that path.

WSIB for construction workers makes sense, and this is why the NDP will be supporting it.

En ce moment, selon le nouveau projet de loi, la Loi 119, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail, il y a près de 90 000 employés de la construction qui n'ont pas droit à la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail. Ils n'y ont pas droit souvent parce que les sous-traitants qui les emploient leur demandent d'être travailleurs indépendants. Comme travailleur indépendant, tu n'as pas besoin de payer les primes de sécurité professionnelle. Par contre, s'il t'arrive un accident au travail, tu auras droit à la couverture. Ce qui arrive dans ce temps-là c'est que certaines compagnies qui traitent leurs employés comme des employés, eux paient les primes et leurs employés sont couverts. D'autres compagnies un peu moins scrupuleuses vont demander à leurs employés d'être des sous-traitants indépendants. Comme sous-traitants indépendants, cela veut dire que la compagnie qui les embauche n'a pas besoin de payer leurs primes à la sécurité du travail. Par contre, ces gens-là ont droit aux bénéfices, ce qui veut dire que de moins en moins de travailleurs légitimes et d'organismes légitimes paient les primes,

bien que le nombre d'accidents continue d'augmenter. Ceci devait être changé et la loi le fera.

Par contre, il y a encore toute une catégorie d'employés qui ne seront pas couverts. On parle ici des personnes qui travaillent dans ce qu'on appelle des travaux de rénovation domiciliaire, et ce n'est pas acceptable.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

There being none, pursuant to the order of the House dated November 5, 2008, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Fonseca has moved third reading of Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until after question period today.

Third reading vote deferred.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Orders of the day. Deputy government House leader.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have no further business at this time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): There being no further business at this time, this House will recess until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1004 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I would like to welcome to the chamber the students of O'Gorman High School, who are here today, all the way from Timmins—they drove down last night and will be back in Timmins by tomorrow—and all the firefighters who are here with us today.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I'd like to introduce Fred LeBlanc, president of the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association; Mark McKinnon, the vice-president; and Barry Quinn, the secretary/treasurer. Welcome, Fred, Mark and Barry, and all the other firefighters who are here.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Shortly, we will be joined by members from OPSEU; from CUPE 3903, the York University faculty; and also SEIU Justice for Janitors.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted to welcome Jim Holmes and Rich Kerr, from the London Professional Firefighters Association.

Mr. Jim Brownell: I would like to introduce Bruce Donig, president of the Cornwall Professional Firefighters Association.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I would like to introduce to members of the Legislature and welcome to the Legislature Terry Colburn and Corry Vanderlee, from the St. Catharines Professional Fire Fighters Association.

Mr. Jeff Leal: It always gives me great pleasure to introduce Paul Wilson from the Peterborough Fire Department, a great service in the city of Peterborough.

Mr. Kim Craitor: I am pleased to introduce Tim Lea and Michael Collee, two members of the Niagara Falls Professional Firefighters Association, who have taken the time to come up here.

Mr. Dave Levac: I would like to introduce all the members of the professional firefighters association who are not here, and thank them for allowing these guys to be here.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Just for reciprocity, I want to welcome Rod MacDonald, from the Stratford firefighters group. I am delighted that he is here today.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I would like to introduce John Sobey, from the firefighters in my riding. He and his team are keeping us safe all the time. Thank you very much.

Mr. Jim Wilson: It is my honour to introduce Stephen Emo of Collingwood Professional Firefighters Association, who is here with us today.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I would like to welcome, in the public gallery, Carrie Pearson, who is my assistant in the Lindsay office, and Brook Jewell, our co-op student from Lindsay Collegiate and Vocational Institute, who also works in our Lindsay office for a few months. I'd like to welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Somewhere in the audience—there are so many firefighters here, which is great—is Dan Bonnar, president of the Ajax Firefighters.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I just want to bring to the House's attention the fact that SEIU, CUPE and OPSEU have just arrived.

Mr. John Yakabuski: With so many firefighters here, perhaps they could do something with the fire that seems to be going on in here—it's about 90 degrees.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Welcome to North Bay firefighters Tim Mainville, Keith Hann and Brian Boutilier, whom I don't see yet but I know they are coming today. We welcome them.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I'd like to welcome the firefighters, as well as the Hamilton firefighters, and Henry Watson, who's here today.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I would like to apologize to the firefighters in Oxford county who couldn't be here today.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I would like you to help me welcome firefighters from Burlington: President Dan VanderLelie, Paul Cunningham, Jeff Rock and Sandor Toth.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the honourable members. That was a useful test for me on remembering riding names for members.

I want to take this opportunity on behalf of the member from Hamilton Centre and page Bradyn Litster to welcome her father Dwayne Litster to the gallery today. Welcome.

As well, I want to take this opportunity to welcome, in the Speaker's gallery, a good friend of mine, Warren

Scott from the St. Thomas Professional Firefighters Association. Welcome, Warren.

And to the honourable member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, who made comment about the heat in the chamber this morning: As I relayed earlier, there were some technical difficulties. Perhaps this heat will help to cool the atmosphere in the chamber today. The Speaker would very much appreciate that.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I will try and respect your suggestion, Speaker.

My question, through you, is to the Premier. Yesterday, your government received the annual report from the task force on prosperity chaired by the Dean of the Rotman School of Management, Dr. Roger Martin, and the great economic minds in your administration dismissed that expert advice and effectively flushed the \$1-million-a-year cost of the task force down the toilet.

One of Dr. Martin's recommendations was that, in these difficult economic times, your government should tighten its belt and perhaps bring in a restraint program. Premier, are you at least going to accept that advice? And when can we see a plan?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to take the question. I know that my colleague will recall that, as part of our fall economic statement, the Minister of Finance announced further restraint measures that we would adopt. He announced as well that we would not be proceeding as quickly with some of our new initiatives.

But the spirit of the question is laudable. I think it's important that we all take a look at how we conduct ourselves in government. I've asked the finance minister to consider other measures that we might bring forward to this House. There will be more measures that we will adopt, I can say. I should also say they will be largely symbolic in nature in terms of the limited savings to be achieved there, but I think we have a responsibility to lead by example.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My recollection is that one restraint measure was a \$53-million cut to health care.

Press reports today indicate that tomorrow's federal economic update will include things like restricting use of government planes, cutting travel for cabinet ministers and senior civil servants, ending unnecessary travel and entertainment, and spending cuts at crown corporations and agencies. The federal government, Premier, clearly understands that politicians and governments have to lead the way in showing restraint during difficult economic times. What is your plan and when will we see it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Just to go up to the 30,000-foot level for a moment: My colleague will know that we

have achieved savings in 2007-08 of \$806 million. Through the fall economic statement, we have announced an additional \$108 million by way of savings. But beyond that, again in keeping with the issue specifically raised by the leader of the official opposition, we intend to announce further measures that we think we ought to adopt. I think, again, they are largely symbolic. The financial savings will be somewhat modest, given the multi-billion-dollar budget that we manage. But I think it's important that we do that and we look forward to announcing that in due course.

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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: In terms of those savings, I'd say, "Show me the beef." Send us that list. We'd love to see it.

Just in this fiscal year, when we knew we were already in tough economic times, heading for a deficit and have-not status in this province for the first time in our history, your government spent up to \$2.7 million—tax dollars—on a party for your friends in Windsor; you spend \$2.5 million for hotel rooms; you personally spent \$1 million in government flights to fly to places like Hamilton from Toronto; you spent \$4.5 million—tax dollars—for spin doctors in the Ministry of Education; on and on.

Premier, when are you going to show real leadership, accept expert advice, do the right thing, lead the way and bring in a restraint plan to cut and curtail unnecessary spending?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We will always make efforts to act responsibly when it comes to managing the people's money. We understand how hard Ontarians work for their money, and we understand their very legitimate expectations of us, as people privileged to serve them through government.

Let me talk a little bit about the restraint initiatives that were just announced. We talked about completing the hiring of 9,000 nurses over a longer period of time than anticipated; that will save us some \$50 million. We're deferring less urgent action—education capital improvement projects; that will save us \$25 million. We're delaying the launch of our Ontario social venture capital fund; that's \$20 million.

Those are the kinds of things that we have looked at, but again, specific to the kinds of issues raised by my colleague, there will be an announcement in due course that deals with those things that we can more specifically do ourselves, as members of the government.

TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier: On November 3, Ontarians woke up to the grim reality that under Dalton McGuinty, Ontario had become a have-not province. Yesterday, the Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress, chaired by Dr. Roger Martin, shone a spotlight on the fact that Ontario has the highest tax on new business investment in all of

North America. That means that if you're starting a new business in Ontario or expanding an existing one, you are hit with punishing taxes greater than our sister provinces or competing states.

Premier, will you commit to following Dr. Martin's good advice and reduce the level of business income taxes as part of a plan to grow Ontario out of its have-not status?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to take the first part of this question and I want to speak to this whole issue of Ontario being a have-not province. I want to remind my colleague once again of the facts. There are only three provinces in Canada which are net contributors to the federation: Ontario, Alberta and BC. This year, Ontarians will contribute \$23.5 billion to Ottawa for distribution to the rest of the country. If you take a look at the net contributions from Alberta and BC, Ontario's contribution is 40% bigger.

The issue in Ontario is not that we're not generating enough wealth; it's that we're not able to keep enough of our own wealth—just to set the record straight when it comes to this whole issue of whether or not Ontario has enough wealth.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, not only is Ontario now a have-not province, but when it comes to answers to grow us out of it, we have a have-not Premier. You put Dr. Martin's latest report on the shelf with such speed, it gave the press gallery whiplash.

Remember that on September 25, 2006, you announced Roger Martin would be your special economic adviser. Since then, you've ignored his advice so often and so predictably, he's probably feeling like a member of the Liberal caucus.

Your only plan to date to grow us out of have-not status is to put out your hand to Ottawa and say, "Please, sir, can I have another?" Premier, when, if ever, will we see your plan to grow Ontario out of its have-not status, and will you include Dr. Martin's recommendation to lower the business income tax once and for all?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I always appreciate the good work done by Dr. Roger Martin and his institute, and we give careful consideration to his advice. I just want to remind my colleague of some of the advice that we've received in the past and how we've dealt with it.

Dr. Martin has indicated that we should eliminate the capital tax. Well, we've gone so far as to eliminate it for our manufacturers, and we did it on a retroactive basis. He said that we should encourage investment in machinery and equipment, and we've done that through the capital cost allowance measures we've adopted. He said that we should be focusing more on increasing apprenticeships. Well, we've invested \$75 million in our 2008 budget, and we have thousands more young people enrolled in our apprenticeships. He said we're going to have to do something to address the dropout rate from our high schools. Well, so far, because of the student success measures we've adopted, close to 11,000 more kids are finishing high school every year. Those are direct responses to Dr. Martin's recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, the task force looked at your so-called record on business taxes and they were far from impressed. In fact, last year Dr. Martin said the government was losing tax revenue due to high business taxes, and that's exactly what the economic statement a few weeks ago had shown.

Let's get to this main point: Under Dalton McGuinty, Ontario is now a have-not province. For the first time in the history of Confederation, we are receiving equalization payments. In short, we're on the welfare rolls of Confederation. You know as well as I do that the same outdated tax-and-spend policies that got us into this mess sure the heck aren't going to get us out of this mess.

Since November 3, all you've done is brought in a new WSIB bill that puts punishing new taxes on small businesses, with the goal of shutting them down at the behest of the union bosses.

Under Dalton McGuinty, Ontario is on the welfare rolls of Confederation. Where is your plan to grow us out of it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just can't see things that way. It's such a negative, pessimistic outlook on this great and wonderful province of Ontario, the best province in the best country in the world. I just can't share my colleague's outlook.

Obviously, we have some fundamental differences of opinion when it comes to what we need to do to further strengthen this province. We believe that you've got to invest in innovation. We believe you have to invest in the skills and education of our people. We believe you've got to invest in partnerships with businesses to put them on a stronger and more sustainable footing. We believe that you've got to reduce taxes, but in an affordable and thoughtful and responsible way. We believe those are the foundations for strengthening our economy.

There's one thing more that we believe in: We believe in the future of this province. We believe it's a future filled with great hope. Yes, these are challenging times, but we're going to get through them the way we've always overcome our challenges: by hanging tight and hanging together.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: There is yet more evidence that Ontario's auto sector is in very serious trouble. Oshawa, the home of General Motors, has experienced a 96% increase in the number of employment insurance claims. Windsor, the home of Chrysler Canada, has experienced a 30% increase in employment insurance claims.

My question is this: With thousands of Ontario auto workers already out of work and tens of thousands more in danger of losing their jobs, will the McGuinty government table a made-in-Ontario auto investment plan before this Legislature recesses for Christmas?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Late though it may be, I welcome the support offered by my colleague.

I don't want to belittle the seriousness of the issue and the concern in the minds of all those families who enjoy a good quality of life as a result of somebody in the family working in the auto sector.

What I'm asking my friend to do is to understand that this is a national concern now. One of the single greatest challenges before us has to do with our credit issues and liquidity issues, and we cannot resolve that without the support of the federal government. That's why we'll continue to work hand in hand with the federal government.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I think everyone understands that the auto sector is important nationally, but I think the McGuinty government needs to understand that it is vital for Ontario's economy and it is vital for hundreds of thousands of jobs in this province.

The Conference Board outlines the nature of the problem. The Conference Board says that 15,000 more assembly jobs will be lost by the end of 2009; even more jobs will be lost in the parts side of the auto sector by 2009. The board also says that Ontario's auto sector will lose \$1.7 billion this year as new vehicle production declines by 15.3%.

What I'm asking the Premier is: Instead of referring to Oshawa, instead of referring to Ottawa or instead of referring to Washington, when are we going to see a real auto investment plan from the McGuinty—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

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Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, it is at least passing strange that when we moved ahead aggressively with a \$500-million auto investment strategy, through which we leveraged some \$7.5 billion—\$8 billion in new investment, we received no support. In fact, that was opposed by the New Democratic Party.

The challenge associated with the auto sector in North America is big, to say the least. We understand that the best way for us to move forward in that regard is to work hand in hand with the federal government. The Big Three understand that. The CAW understands that. I think the people of Ontario also understand that. We're going to continue to find a way to work with the federal government and provide some solid foundation on which the Big Three and the auto sector generally can continue to build and grow here in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I want to be very clear with the Premier. Yes, I did disagree with your former strategy of handing \$200 million to General Motors without any product guarantees or any job guarantees. I didn't think it was very good that General Motors got \$200 million and thousands of GM workers were put out of work. I didn't think that was a very good strategy. What's happening now is this: Companies, workers, unions and people who study this industry are all saying it needs some action now, and what went before didn't work, and what went

before can't be relied upon as an excuse by this government.

Are we going to see an auto investment strategy to help sustain hundreds of thousands of jobs from the McGuinty government, and are we going to see it soon, or are we going to continue to see more job losses?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're going to see a determined, thoughtful and—this is really important—concerted effort to address the auto sector challenge.

I have had a couple of conversations with the Prime Minister. Ministers Bryant and Clement are working well and hard together on this particular file. We will continue to do everything we can. We'll continue to stay in touch with representatives of the auto sector, not just the manufacturers but the suppliers, the dealers and the like.

If you take a look around the world, you'll see that it's the national level of government, the federal governments, whether you're talking about the US, Australia, the European Union, for example—now here in Canada, it's not the kind of thing that we Ontario taxpayers can take on on our own. We have to work in concert with the people of Canada.

I understand my friend's impatience in this regard, but we're going to take the time to get it right. We'll take no more than the time we need, but we'll take all the time that we need as well.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: Again to the Premier: It's surprising, when I contrast the Premier's words of just a few years ago with his words now. Just a few years ago, not long ago at all, the Premier was saying, "I will not tolerate any notion that somehow we are backsliding when it comes to the auto sector in the province of Ontario. We're at the highest point in our history when it comes to securing a strong economic advantage on the auto score."

A couple of years ago, the Premier was out there boasting and bragging that the strategy then was the right strategy. Well, that strategy didn't work. The crisis has gotten worse. You can either wait for this to be decided in Washington, or you can try to get out in front of it and position Ontario. What's it going to be? Allow the decisions to be made in Washington when Ontario could lose thousands more jobs, or are you going to state a position that will help sustain jobs in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Obviously, a lot has changed in the last couple of years. Among other things, we've all learned about something called a sub-prime mortgage crisis, that a million Americans lost their homes and that what started out as a domestic financial crisis became a global economic crisis, and we've all been swept up in it.

What has also happened, of course, is that many North American consumers have stopped buying cars, and that's had a direct and profound impact on the health and vigour of our domestic auto sector. There are no magic fixes in this, and there are no quick answers. It's going to require that we bring our very best to address this

challenge. That's why we're going to continue to work closely with the federal government to make sure that we get this right and to make sure that we decide upon a strong foundation on which we can continue to build.

I believe, as the number one automaker in North America, that we have a very strong position from which to move forward. I look forward to making that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Just a couple of years ago, the Premier claimed to have all the answers. In fact, the Premier was getting a sore shoulder from patting himself on the back and saying that Ontario was going to lead the auto sector. Well, Premier, the situation has gotten much, much worse, and it does no help that your government seems to try to be on both sides of the fence at the same time. One day you say the auto sector is important and the next day you say, "Well, maybe it's not as important as worrying about the deficit."

Premier, what people need to hear from this government is, what is this government's position? Are you going to require product guarantees? Are you going to require job guarantees? Are you going to require that the Big Three in the auto sector start producing some energy-efficient vehicles in Ontario? What's the McGuinty government's position, other than referring to Washington and to Ottawa?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: In some ways, the auto sector issue and the challenge is very complicated, but in other ways, I think it's pretty simple. We are the number one auto producer in North America, and for long into the foreseeable future, North Americans are going to continue to buy millions and millions of cars. Why would we give up our position of dominance in this particular market?

What we're going to do in order to retain that is, we're going to pay close attention to what they're doing south of the border, we're going to work hand in hand with the auto sector here in Ontario, and we're also going to work together with the federal government. We're not going to be precipitous. We're not going to be reckless. We will pay very close attention to what is happening on the front lines, and we will continue to work hand in hand with the federal government.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier refers to being reckless. I'll tell you what was reckless, Premier. What was reckless was to hand out \$200 million to General Motors without getting a commitment that the energy-efficient, fuel-efficient hybrid half-ton would be built in Oshawa. What was reckless was to turn out money to corporations without getting guarantees that energy-efficient, fuel-efficient vehicles would be produced in Ontario.

What would be reckless, Premier, about saying to the Big Three that the McGuinty government is prepared to make an investment, but they have to guarantee that Ontario will no longer be the home of gas-guzzling dinosaurs; Ontario will be the home of fuel-efficient, energy-

efficient cars and trucks that people actually want to buy? What would be reckless about the McGuinty government stating that position for Ontario workers and for Ontario jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to a few facts connected with Canadian consumer demands. One of the criticisms that has become fashionable of late is that the Big Three are making products that we don't want. If you take a look at the top 10 selling vehicles in Canada in 2007, four of those in the top 10 are trucks. The number one selling vehicle in Canada is a truck. Five of the top 10 are trucks and minivans. Those are not the most fuel-efficient vehicles.

So, in fairness, as we impose new responsibilities on the Big Three in particular to produce more fuel-efficient vehicles, I think we have a corresponding responsibility as consumers, as we move forward to support our auto sector, to buy more fuel-efficient vehicles. I think that, again, we're all in this together.

1100

PROPANE EXPLOSION

Mr. Toby Barrett: My question is to the Minister of the Environment. Minister, during the 10 days following that explosion at Sunrise Propane last August, did you do any air quality or water quality testing?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I can tell you that our inspectors were on site immediately. They worked very closely with the city of Toronto during that period of time. They were complemented by all of the other emergency staff individuals that were involved during that period of time. With respect to your question, as to whether or not air quality testing was done or water quality testing was done, I will get back to the member on that specific issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Toby Barrett: They were on-site, but you don't need to get back to me. You did not conduct any testing within that 10-day period. I have the proof right here.

You have a legal obligation to perform those tests. Your ministry has a responsibility—the legal responsibility—to protect health and the safety after these types of accidents.

There are firefighters in the Legislature today. Minister, explain to these firefighters, what were their colleagues and area residents exposed to during the 10 days after that blast? And if you don't know, if you cannot explain, will you conduct an investigation into why there was no air quality and no water quality testing done during that crucial 10-day period?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Once again, we're very proud of the work that was done by all the emergency workers, including the firefighters at the time. We worked very closely with the city of Toronto. We had the main responsibility in actually dealing with the clean-up of the situation there. I think that the entire situation, from beginning to end—all of the various people that were involved from the Ministry of the Environment, from the city of Toronto to the firefighters etc., worked in a very exemplary fashion to make sure that the people of that

area were protected in the best possible way. If the member doesn't want me to get back to him with respect to the specific question that he has, I will submit to this Legislature that I will find out the answer to that question and submit it to him anyway.

PAY EQUITY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Labour. In Ontario, almost one in two workers are doing part-time, contract or temporary work and many are being paid considerably less for doing exactly the same work as full-time workers. In the European Union, this would be illegal. Will the minister change the Employment Standards Act so that all workers doing equal work will get equal pay?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I thank the member for the question. Under the Employment Standards Act, temporary employees, including those working for agencies or through agencies, generally have the same rights as all workers. Also, under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, those workers have the exact same rights as all workers in Ontario.

What I can tell the member is that our ministry actually embarked on a consultation over the summer. We have met with Parkdale Community Legal Services, the Workers' Action Centre, and ACCESS, which represents 80% of those temporary agencies. We want to make sure that we review all of those recommendations and continue to work with all employers to ensure the health and safety of all workers in Ontario.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: To the Minister of Labour again: We have a member of CUPE 3903 who has worked 16 years on contract work as a university professor and has to reapply for a job every year. We have OPSEU members here, SEIU members here. They all know that this government is in violation of the UN's declaration that everyone, without discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work. When will this government change its employment legislation and finally bring fairness to Ontario's workplaces?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just remind—we welcome guests to the gallery. We welcome you to observe but we ask that you not participate. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I can say to the member is we are working very closely with the stakeholders: with labour groups, with employers, and speaking to those workers who work through temporary agencies. That's why we embarked on this consultation over the summer. We are reviewing all of those recommendations. From the member's own riding we are working closely with Parkdale Community Legal Services and the Workers' Action Centre.

We want to make sure that workers are treated fairly. I'm sure the member wants workers to be treated fairly. We want to make sure that there is fairness and workers are protected in terms of their health and safety through the Employment Standards Act, through the Occupation-

al Health and Safety Act. That's what we do. It covers all—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I'm constantly hearing references to an internal labour relations issue that I don't think is appropriate to be heard in this chamber. I'm putting the government members on notice, because it's not the first time that this issue has arisen. This is an internal labour matter that the member will be dealing with and I don't need to hear about it in the chamber. I appreciate that.

New question.

ABORIGINAL HOUSING PROGRAM

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Toronto's aboriginal community is large and is growing. In fact, over 35,000 aboriginal Canadians are living in our city, and they are an important part of our ethnic cultural makeup. I've been approached by a number of these communities, especially in the aboriginal groups, to find out what our government is doing in terms of helping to create affordable housing for them, especially for low-income families, so they can spend more of their money on other necessities, such as skills training and saving for their children's education.

Minister, I know you've been delivering \$36 million to Toronto for social housing repairs and \$1.8 million for the rent bank this year. I know you're helping Toronto build new affordable housing through the affordable housing program, but specifically, what is our government doing to assist aboriginal communities with their housing needs?

Hon. Jim Watson: I want to thank the honourable member for Davenport for his question. I was very pleased this morning to be with the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and my colleague the Deputy Premier, in his capacity as MPP for Toronto Centre, at the Miziwe Biik Development Corp., where we signed a memorandum of understanding with the development corporation to flow \$20 million for aboriginal housing projects in the greater Toronto area.

This money is part of the \$80-million aboriginal trust funds that have flowed to the province of Ontario, and this money will go into building new affordable housing units, housing repairs, as well as home ownership loans that will help create housing opportunities for close to 320 families in the greater Toronto area.

I want to in conclusion thank nine-year-old Briar Perrier, who sold Minister Smitherman, Minister Duguid and I these wonderful bracelets. She has raised \$1,200 for aboriginal housing.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: That's great news, and I want to congratulate the minister on signing such an important memorandum of understanding. I'm sure this money will be of great benefit to the households who receive it.

We know that the majority of the aboriginal population throughout Ontario is very young, we know that

over 25% of the aboriginal population is 15 years old or younger and we also know that a stable and secure home is important to lift people out of poverty; it is a basic determinant of health and, for that matter, a healthy future. It gives youth a foundation they need to succeed. Minister, can you tell us how this memorandum of understanding signed today fits into this government's commitment to improve the quality of life for aboriginal people in Ontario and specifically for aboriginals in Toronto?

Hon. Jim Watson: I refer it to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I too rise with Briar's bracelet on today to respond to this question. I want to say—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. You're supposed to seek unanimous consent to be wearing something in the chamber. It's clear in the standing orders.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I hear the comments, but we have rules that are very clear in this place. There was reference made to the bracelet.

Hon. Brad Duguid: That's fair enough, Mr. Speaker. My apologies.

I rise today to say that we are on the threshold of making real progress when it comes to improving the quality of life of First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities across this province. It starts with respecting aboriginal communities, in a respectful, trusting relationship. That's being built right now in an unprecedented way, but it also starts with building that in the nature of government-to-government relationships.

That's what this particular initiative respects, because Miziwe Biik provides the aboriginal community with the responsibility of administering this program. I think that's what really helps here. That's what was really exciting this morning—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

1110

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is to the Minister of Labour. The official opposition's proposal at committee for the WSIB legislation would fully exempt executive officers from paying you WSIB premiums. It was struck down by your Liberal colleagues. Instead, you brought forward a regulation that, according to you, will allow exemptions for executive officers and directors in the future, clearly a move on your part to please big business and unions. Your amendment doesn't address executive officers or independent officers for small and medium-sized businesses who may be on jobs sites and already carry their own insurance.

Along with verifying who is covered and who isn't, how do you plan to enforce your regulation?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I can say to the member is that this government listened to all stakeholders, and we brought forward an amendment that is for executive officers or a partner who is in the office. Yes, if somebody

is out on the construction site, they have to be covered by WSIB because those are risky places; they are dangerous places. We want to make sure that they are covered. That is what we have brought forward.

I had a chance to speak again to the legislation earlier this morning, and this proposed legislation, if I put it into the terms—and I was thinking about this as I was coming in to Queen's Park the other day—if only 60% of drivers out on the road were insured and they were paying 100% of the freight for all the others, I don't think that would be fair. This is about covering everybody—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Minister, you're surely aware of the economic difficulties we are going through in the province, and more and more layoffs are taking place every day. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, your legislation is a cash grab of over half a billion from hard-working small businesses. That's half a billion dollars into your labour monopoly that has proven year after year that it is unable to manage its unfunded liability, which is now over \$8 billion.

Why are you discriminating against executive officers of small and medium-sized businesses when they are on the job site and already carry their own coverage?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: It's unfortunate that this member does not want to support legitimate, fair, hard-working companies that are out there that are being undercut by bad actors: those who are not paying their fair share.

This is about fairness. It's about safety for those workers. It's making sure that all workers on a construction site are covered. It's combating the underground economic activity that takes place in construction. It's about the revenue leakage that is happening with WSIB, where 60% of the industry is paying for 100% of the claims. That's unfair. I would hope the member can understand that.

It is about fairness, it is about safety, and it is about working with labour, with employers, and especially keeping in mind that this is for all those Ontario workers out in the construction sector.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. The Canadian Association of Food Banks reported yesterday that the number of working Ontarians turning to food banks increased significantly in the year 2008. How does the minister explain this?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me start by thanking Food Banks Canada for their report. It is yet another important piece of information for us, as we develop our poverty reduction strategy and as we begin to implement it. I want to thank them for their contribution, not only this report, but also the Ontario Association of Food Banks for their significant contributions to our strategy.

I have had a chance to look briefly at the report. I look forward to reviewing it in more detail, but I was happy to note that 4,000 fewer Ontarians used food banks this year

compared to last year, on a monthly basis; 24,000 fewer Ontarians used food banks each month compared to the peak in 2005.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Prue: The minister failed to answer the question. The question is: Why is it that more and more working Ontarians are being forced into the food bank?

The minister and her government often talk about increases to the minimum wage, but this report shows that the increases have not been enough to stop more and more working Ontarians from relying on food banks.

The report last week by well-known economist Jim Stanford found that a minimum wage of \$16 an hour is needed for a single parent raising a child to meet her family's basic needs in Toronto. This government repeatedly refuses to increase the minimum wage to a fair and decent level, saying it will hurt business, even though leading economists say it just isn't so.

My question: Why won't the minister acknowledge that Ontario's minimum wage is too low to live on and increase it to a liveable level of \$10.25 now?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member highlights that we still have a challenge when it comes to poverty in this province. None of us are denying that we have a problem; in fact, we're prepared to address the problem. We are moving aggressively, but in a balanced way, on minimum wage. I think it's very important that minimum wage continues to increase, but let's think about it for a second. When we were elected in 2003, it had been flat-lined for nine years at \$6.85. It's gone up now to \$8.75 an hour, and it's on its way to \$10.25. That's an aggressive but balanced approach to increasing minimum wage.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the Attorney General. Ontarians have the right to live without fear in their homes and in their communities. Many Ontarians want to know that we are taking the necessary steps to prevent and end violence against women, youth and children.

Earlier this year, our government committed over \$8 million in new funding to help ensure that women who are victims of abuse and their children get help faster and are better protected from future harm. Those investments included a new early victim contact program, more annual ongoing funding for the partner assault response program, and new annual funding to the province's 79 supervised access program locations.

Yesterday, the Attorney General introduced legislation that included important reforms to the restraining order regime in this province. Could the Attorney General tell us how the new legislation, if passed, would strengthen the protections for vulnerable women and children?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I join my colleague from Huron-Bruce and all members of this House in saying that we must have an Ontario where all are able to live their lives free of abuse and violence. Restraining orders are those orders that judges make to keep the vulnerable, particularly women and children, safe. But we've heard

for more than 10 years, and my colleague from Durham has been an advocate, that the restraining order system is not tough enough, it's not available as it should be, and they are not enforced as they should be. So just the other day I was pleased to introduce legislation that will make the orders more available, will put real teeth into the orders and will give them real enforcement that will keep our women and children, and all Ontarians, safe from abuse and violence.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Sadly, violence against women and children in times of family breakdown and distress is not something that is new. In fact, many people have been calling for a strengthened restraining order regime for a number of years. I know that we have had legislative attempts in the past to reform the restraining order regime, but could the Attorney General tell us why this legislation will bring in the changes that we need to make life safer for women and children?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: My colleague is right. For more than 10 years, every member of this House and ones before have stood and said, "We need to reform." There was a unanimous bill passed by this House, but not proclaimed, that spoke to the principle. There are many members of all parties who have brought forward initiatives, so we have all worked collectively, and what we introduced on Monday is the product of all-party and all-corners-of this-province support for a system that will be stronger and tougher.

Let me just let you know what an advocate for a world without violence against women said about this. Pam Cross, who is well known to all, says, "Those of us who work with abused women and children are thrilled with this package of family law reforms. This legislation would help hundreds of women and children by making justice faster, more accessible and more affordable." To all of us, the Premier, the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore, my colleague, children's minister—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

1120

MINISTERS' COMMENTS

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier.

Premier, last Thursday, members of your caucus voted to defeat my resolution to build new long-term-care beds in Simcoe and Grey counties. Just before the vote, your Minister of Education said twice, "Why should we care about seniors in Simcoe-Grey?" and that disrespectful comment was repeated by your Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Premier, you're here to govern for all the people of Ontario. Don't you think your ministers should be apologizing to the senior citizens who are waiting for a long-term-care bed in Simcoe and Grey counties?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. David Caplan: I think the member would want to recognize that this government has worked very hard to continue on the progress that we've made when it comes to long-term care. In fact, we have a comprehensive long-term-care strategy which is going to benefit

not only the members you represent in the community of Simcoe-Grey, but all Ontarians right across the province.

That includes things like quality improvement. We're going to measure and for the very first time publicly report health outcomes and satisfaction through the Ontario Health Quality Council. We're working with our partners in the sector to implement the recommendations that Shirlee Sharkey made to improve the quality of care within our homes.

We have new legislation and new regulations. I know the member would want to acknowledge that we have increased staff capacity within—we've added over 2,500 more personal support care workers, over 2,000 more nurses. We've already—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: I didn't hear any apology in that ramble.

Premier, let me read you some e-mails I've received.

A registered nurse in Simcoe county wrote, "I am totally disgusted at the responses of the two ministers who were totally out of line in their remarks to your presentation."

Another constituent even wrote an e-mail to you, Premier, that said, "(this) clearly outlines your party's despicable behaviour toward the people of Ontario and especially to the senior citizens of Simcoe-Grey. I urgently request that the two ministers named provide a public apology for their insolent behaviour...."

Premier, will you apologize to the 4,000 senior citizens waiting for a long-term-care bed in the Simcoe and Grey catchment areas in central Ontario?

Hon. David Caplan: I'm going to ask the Minister of Education to respond.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just want to be clear that the Minister of Children and Youth Services and I have actually issued a statement that made it very clear that on the day in question, what we were talking about was support for long-term-care homes for all of Ontario. We are so committed in each of our ridings—but across the whole province. The Minister of Health has spoken to our government's record.

I want to be clear to all of the constituents in the member opposite's riding that there is absolutely no ill will that comes from any of us on this side of the House to them. We are completely supportive of their needs, and we will work as a government to provide support for the health needs of all Ontarians.

ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. You describe yourself as the education Premier. That's what you said when you were first elected. If you're the education Premier, why are you not responding to the desperate calls for help from the children of Attawapiskat who are trying to get their school replaced?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: One of the challenges, I think, for our society in Canada is the issue of the jurisdictional debate—

Interjections.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: No, listen. I'm not going to hide behind the jurisdictional debate. I just want to raise it as an issue that we need to deal with.

The reality is that the federal government, as you know and as the member opposite knows quite well, has had responsibility for education on-reserve for those children.

What you need to know is that I am working with First Nations, Metis and Inuit people across this province to see if there are ways that we can support the education of all aboriginal children. We have already got in place an aboriginal framework for education in the province. We are in the process of developing tripartite conversations.

It is extremely important to me, as the Minister of Education, that we support the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Madam Minister, these kids are desperate. They've been trying to get a school rebuilt in that community for the better part of 10 years. It is an absolutely desperate situation.

Let me remind you of a couple of things. First of all, these kids are Ontario citizens and they deserve the full attention of their provincial government when it comes to education.

Let me tell you something else, Madam Minister. Ontario signed Treaty 9, and one of the reasons that people signed the treaty over 100 years ago with the province was to make sure that they had education for their kids. So let me ask you on behalf of those children: What are you prepared to do as a province to make sure that those kids get the same education as any other child in this province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Brad Duguid: The member knows full well that education on reserves is a federal responsibility. But if he listened closely to the Minister of Education, he would have noticed that after generations and generations of governments that have just allowed it to stop there, this Minister of Education is saying we've got to do more. We're going to do more because these young people deserve the same access to opportunity that every person in Ontario has. So we're committed to working with the federal government if necessary, and we're also committed to working with First Nations if we have to go after the federal government to make sure that that equal opportunity can be developed here in this province. Because the member is right: There are two tiers of education right now across this country when it comes to First Nations, Inuit and Metis students and non-aboriginal students, and we're committed to working with all partners to resolve—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ELECTRICITY GENERATION

Mr. Charles Sousa: My question is to the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Minister, over the summer you came to Mississauga South to announce that Lakeview will not be considered as a potential site for a new gas-fired power plant. After hosting a dirty coal plant for 40 years, the residents of Lakeview, and indeed all of Mississauga, welcome the decision to protect our waterfront. Now that Lakeview is not an option for power generation, we are one step closer to our goal of revitalizing the area.

At the same time, however, you stated that you will be directing the Ontario Power Authority to initiate a request for proposal for a new gas-fired power plant in the southwest GTA. Since then, you have issued that directive and the RFP is under way. Minister, my constituents are apprehensive about this. They're not sure what this means for the community or when or how decisions will be made. What are the requirements for the RFP, how will the location of the new plant be decided and how can communities get involved in the process?

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to thank the honourable member and I want to acknowledge that he has been very proactive on the part of his constituents.

As our province undergoes the bold ambition of eliminating coal, we have a need for peak capacity. That is, when a lot of people at the same time demand energy, it's our obligation that it be available to them, and accordingly, these gas-fired power plants are part and parcel of that. I did direct the OPA to initiate a process that will see 850 megawatts located in the southwest GTA. This is a process that will be completed by June of next year, with an in-service date for the plant no later than the end of 2013.

The project will be required to undergo all local, municipal and environmental standards, and there's going to be a very big process of involvement with communities. We had a great town hall meeting a few weeks back in Mississauga. Since then there have been efforts by the OPA in more localized centres in the southwest GTA to involve the public, give them information and respond to their questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Charles Sousa: As you know, the Clarkson airshed study found that we have a stressed airshed in Mississauga South. Emissions from industry, the QEW and nearby coal plants all played a role in these findings. Even though the Lakeview coal plant has been demolished and the Nanticoke plant is soon to follow, air quality remains a concern. As such, people are worried about the cumulative effect of existing emitters and a new gas-fired power plant on the air we breathe. I've heard from many community leaders and ratepayers who raise the same concerns about gas plant emissions, like CO₂ and particulate matter. In response, many have suggested that power generation should be placed farther away from residential communities. In addition, they proposed that new power be transmitted over greater distances via transmission lines.

Minister, in light of the finding of the Clarkson airshed study, why is it necessary for new gas-fired power generation to be built in the southwest GTA?

Hon. George Smitherman: In the southwest GTA we have a characteristic which is evident in quite a few parts of the greater Toronto area, which is growth. That is an area where hospitals are growing, as one example, and demanding more electricity. It's crucial that we meet those needs reliably.

On the matter at hand from the member about the Clarkson airshed study, a couple of things that I think are very important to keep in mind: First and foremost, we've already taken out of play there a very large polluter that is Lakeview. This airshed is downwind of Nanticoke. Nanticoke is the single largest source of air pollution in Ontario and that's why it will be out of service as a coal-burning plant by 2014.

That's the single-largest climate change initiative and should be very, very beneficial to the residents of Clarkson, who are dramatically downwind from that.

1130

This new gas-fired facility in the southwest GTA will meet the needs as dictated by the Environmental Assessment Act, and overall, we see progress towards substantial improvement in the air—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

PESTICIDES

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of the Environment. During the debate on Bill 64, the pesticide ban, you assured cemeteries that they would be exempt. We now find that you have broken your promise, but given your track record, nobody is surprised.

You further committed to comprehensive consultations with lawn care professionals to implement regulations in a sensible way, with a realistic timetable. You have gone back on your word to them as well.

If your government understood business at all, you would recognize that your regulations leave them no room and no time to plan or prepare for the 2009 growing season. Why can't you people keep your word?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Well—and I appreciate the question—we have been very adamant on the whole pesticide situation that we were going to implement the new rules and regulations by the growing season of 2009. We have said that right from the very beginning, and we intend to do that.

But, as the member also knows, the final regulations are on the EBR right now. We're looking for comments from individuals. We've met with the same organizations that he has obviously met with within the last day or so. We are still reviewing the situation, and we'll be making a final determination shortly.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Those regulations will be finalized in March, and that doesn't give anybody enough time.

Your regulations will, further, create the very strange situation of allowing individuals the right to apply class 7 pesticides, such as Grub Eliminator, but not allow professionals to do the same.

Many people, including seniors and the disabled, rely on professionals to take care of their properties—professionals who are trained to deal with the products in the safest possible manner, including not requiring the homeowner to deal with the storage or disposal of unused product.

Will you commit to correcting this blatant inconsistency immediately?

Hon. John Gerretsen: We know where this government stands on this particular issue. We want to protect children in the best way we know possible as far as banning the cosmetic use of pesticides is concerned.

We also realize that there are certain products that under certain circumstances could be used for purposes other than—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Renfrew, you just asked the question. I would ask that you be respectful and listen to the answer.

Hon. John Gerretsen: As he well knows, there are certain products that can be used for different purposes. For those purposes, particularly when we're talking about indoor purposes, there will be a use of restricted products on that list that will be sold to individuals on an individual basis for those specific purposes.

We intend to bring in the best possible law, as we have done, and the best possible rules and regulations to make sure that the children of this province are—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Rouge Valley Health System, Ajax and Pickering hospital, recently completed a state-of-the-art, nine-bed psychiatric intensive care unit costing \$3 million—not too many of those around.

Can the minister explain why, in spite of Durham region's desperate need for these psychiatric services, these new beds will not be used for mental health, but will be replaced by general beds?

Hon. David Caplan: As the member is well aware, the hospital, working with the Central East Local Health Integration Network, made a determination as to the very best way that they could be able to provide the services both for general surgical and also for mental health to the people served by Durham region. It was, in their determination—certainly not by the ministry—the best way to coordinate and to be able to configure the particular services in this area.

I know that the member is well aware that this is an example of people in local community determining how to best meet local needs. This is the whole advent and reason behind the formation of local health integration networks, that, in fact, it is people empowered within

their own community who are in the best position to be able to direct and determine the kind of care needs for the populations they are serving.

I know that this proposal has moved forward. I know that it has created a lot of conversation within—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: The fact is, the people of Ontario spent \$3 million to build this psychiatric intensive care unit, and it will never be used. The people from Durham region want to have this psychiatric unit in their hospital.

Ontario is facing a mental health services crisis. The Canadian Psychiatric Association recommends that patients be admitted within 24 hours in case of a high degree of risk to self or others, yet in Ontario, people often have to wait five days or longer, often with catastrophic consequences. Without these new psychiatric beds, Durham residents will face increased wait times and potentially devastating outcomes. My question is simple: How can this government shut down mental health facilities in a time of desperate need?

Hon. David Caplan: The characterization of the member is unfortunate and simply incorrect. Facilities are not being shut down; they are simply being configured in a different way.

In fact, mental health funding in the province of Ontario has increased: over \$200 million in funding to expand services to over 200,000 additional Ontarians, hiring more than 1,100 new mental health workers.

Interjections.

Hon. David Caplan: I would contrast that with the experience under Mr. Kormos or his colleagues in the New Democratic Party, who cut mental health funding by over \$23 million in 1992, and a further cut, my friends, by over \$42 million in 1994 and 1995.

Interjections.

Hon. David Caplan: I am not going to take a lecture from the member opposite, given his very sorry record, given the treatment of the mentally ill under his party. It's—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

DEFERRED VOTES

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 119, Loi modifiant la

Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1137 to 1147.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Fonseca has moved third reading of Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.

All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Duncan, Dwight	Miller, Paul
Arthurs, Wayne	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Milloy, John
Balkissoon, Bas	Fonseca, Peter	Mitchell, Carol
Bentley, Christopher	Gerretsen, John	Moridi, Reza
Best, Margaret	Gélinas, France	Naqvi, Yasir
Bisson, Gilles	Gravelle, Michael	Oraziotti, David
Bradley, James J.	Horwath, Andrea	Pendergast, Leeanna
Brotten, Laurel C.	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Brown, Michael A.	Jaczek, Helena	Prue, Michael
Brownell, Jim	Jeffrey, Linda	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bryant, Michael	Kormos, Peter	Ramal, Khalil
Cansfield, Donna H.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ramsay, David
Caplan, David	Leal, Jeff	Ruprecht, Tony
Carroll, Aileen	Levac, Dave	Sandals, Liz
Chan, Michael	Mangat, Amrit	Smith, Monique
Colle, Mike	Marchese, Rosario	Smitherman, George
Craiton, Kim	Matthews, Deborah	Sousa, Charles
Crozier, Bruce	Mauro, Bill	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	McGuinty, Dalton	Wilkinson, John
Dickson, Joe	McMeekin, Ted	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dombrowsky, Leona	McNeely, Phil	
Duguid, Brad	Meilleur, Madeleine	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All opposed, please rise.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Martiniuk, Gerry	Scott, Laurie
Barrett, Toby	Miller, Norm	Shurman, Peter
Dunlop, Garfield	Munro, Julia	Sterling, Norman W.
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	Wilson, Jim
Hudak, Tim	Quellette, Jerry J.	Yakabuski, John
Jones, Sylvia	Runciman, Robert W.	
MacLeod, Lisa	Savoline, Joyce	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 64; the nays are 19.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Just a reminder to members that I encourage everyone to join the press gallery tonight at their gallery auction in support of the United Way.

This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1151 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jim Brownell: I would like to introduce Damian Kraemer in the gallery here, a resident of Toronto Centre—not from my great riding of Stormont—Dundas—

South Glengarry but here in Toronto Centre, an associate with Gowlings here in Toronto.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I forgot to introduce members of the Sudbury Professional Fire Fighters Association who were here this morning. So a little bit late, Mark Muldoon, Mark Gobbo, Danny Wendler, Chad Witmore, Brent Cadotte and Sean McMahon.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Introductions? Members' statements?

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: My apologies. It isn't so much a matter of there not being guests; it's a matter of there not being very many members present to introduce those guests, obviously.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It's not a point of order.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I stand before you today to inform this House and the citizens of Ontario about a real injustice and tragedy that is occurring at the racetracks of our province while the government of Ontario refuses to protect the agricultural community.

The previous government allowed racetracks to install slot machines. An agreement dated July 31, 2000, between Georgian Downs Ltd. and the OLG stated the following: "and whereas the slot programs at racetracks is intended to promote live horse racing in the province and subsequently benefit the agricultural sector in Ontario and the OLG supports this endeavour."

What is happening today? Exactly the opposite. The OLG, the completely dysfunctional Ontario Racing Commission and the McGuinty Liberals are allowing the casino licence holders to suspend or cancel racing dates. For example, this January and February, there will be no racing at Georgian Downs.

Do horses still have to be fed? Of course they do. Do racing stables still have ongoing costs such as heat, hydro and insurance? Yes, they do. Will cancelling racing dates have a negative impact on agriculture? Yes. Will the slot machines at Georgian Downs be closed at the same time? No; you bet they won't.

While the McGuinty Liberals and the OLG hold lavish \$2.7-million parties at Casino Windsor, while the McGuinty Liberals allow the useless expansion at Casino Windsor to run hundreds of millions over budget, they refuse to come to the assistance of citizens of rural Ontario who depend upon harness racing to feed their families.

I call upon the Legislature to demand a public inquiry into the actions of the OLG and the Ontario Racing Commission.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd ask for unanimous consent for all parties to speak for

up to five minutes on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? I heard a no.

Members' statements?

Mr. John O'Toole: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Could you please identify who said no?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I heard a no.

Interjections: I didn't.

Mr. John O'Toole: I didn't.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'll allow the member to seek unanimous consent once again.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It's my understanding that this was to be done after members' statements. Would the member defer asking for unanimous consent until after the finishing of members' statements?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Yes, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We'll continue with members' statements.

WILSON CAULFIELD

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I recently attended the Ontario Senior Achievement Awards ceremony. Recipients are those who have made a significant contribution to their community after turning 65 years of age.

One such individual is Wilson Caulfield of Brampton. In the early 1980s, Mr. Caulfield joined his local service club, the Kiwanis, and recommended they institute a new program which would capture discarded prescription eye glasses, collect them in a central location in Ontario and distribute them to developing countries. The eyeglass project created by Mr. Caulfield has helped thousands of people in developing countries who would not otherwise have had the benefit of sight. Over the years, more than 66,000 pairs of eyeglasses have given the gift of sight to literally thousands and thousands of people who would not otherwise have been able to read and write, sew or build. The eyeglass project volunteers work in collaboration with eye clinics where ophthalmologists and optometrists provide eye examinations and treatment, and opticians ensure that patients receive glasses best suited to correct their vision.

This project continues today through the Kiwanis Club of Islington. Mr. Caulfield was recognized by the Kiwanis of the Year Award in 1998 for his accomplishments with the eyeglass project.

The Ontario Senior Achievement Award honours those who have made outstanding contributions to their communities. Please join me in congratulating Mr. Caulfield on having been recognized and chosen as a Senior Achievement Award recipient.

CYRIL LEEDER

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I rise today to congratulate the Ottawa Senators chief operating officer, Cyril Leeder, on winning the Ottawa Chamber of Commerce Business Person of the Year.

Cyril has been with the Senators since the franchise returned to the NHL in 1992. Along with owner Eugene Melnyk, Cyril has worked hard to make the Sens a great success and to bring the 2009 IIHF World Junior Championships to Ottawa this winter—and now they have their sights on a major league soccer team for Ottawa.

That most recent project had Cyril and Eugene in California on Thursday, so Cyril's beautiful wife, Lydia, was there at the dinner to accept the award.

Born in Brockville, Cyril is a real asset to eastern Ontario. He serves on the board of directors of the Ottawa Congress Centre and the marketing board for the National Arts Centre.

I was very happy to be at the dinner to recognize so many outstanding businesses and business people of my great city, Ottawa. My only regret about Cyril winning the gold is that my 38-year-old son Ian Sterling, president of Doherty and Associates Investment Counsel, won the silver. I want to take this opportunity to say just how proud a dad I am of my son Ian and thank his beautiful wife Tanya for her support, and their three great kids, my grandkids.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I just want to say how concerned we in the opposition are that, for the first time in many years, the government has not allowed us to take five minutes per party and speak about this incredibly important day, which is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

We are absolutely firm in our demand for this. I know the vote won't happen until after this, so certainly we would like to see that. You know, there's always time for everything else except in the case where one out of every two women, 51%, experience abuse or assault during the course of their lifetime. So I would ask every member of the House to vote in favour of five minutes at least, so that each party can speak about this important topic. To not do so is, of course, really, to just ignore the spirit of the day and the importance of the day and the importance of this day to all of the various women's groups that are working so hard in their battle against the battle against women.

Again, I would just hope that in the deferred vote after members' statements there is unanimous consent for statements on the issue of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

MIKE NEUTS

Mr. Pat Hoy: The Attorney General's Victim Services Award of Distinction ceremony will be held tomorrow. I am honoured to announce that Mike Neuts from my riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex is one of 13 recipients.

This award recognizes Mr. Neuts's leadership, courage and dedication in raising the profile of victims' issues in the province of Ontario.

Since the tragic death of his son Myles in 1998, he has dedicated his time to educate children and adults on anti-bullying, so that no other parent may know the pain of losing a child to this senseless act.

For the past 10 years, he has been a crusader for a bully-free society. He has been to 234 schools, spoken to more than 74,000 students and more than 16,757 adults, and has attended well over 500 different events. He has worked hard to ensure the recommendations of the coroner's inquest are followed. He participated in the development of the Report 2000 on youth violence in Ontario schools and communities. He has been to Windsor, Warton, London, Watford, Kitchener, Komoka, Hamilton, Toronto, Bowmanville, Ottawa and Owen Sound, just to name a few of the places in Ontario, and travelled to Alberta.

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This much deserved recognition is a testament to Mr. Neuts's tireless efforts to raise awareness and to effect positive changes in the lives of children, educators and law enforcement officials.

On behalf of the citizens of Ontario, thank you and congratulations to Mike Neuts for his outstanding contribution to make a better future for families and communities.

EMERGENCY INTERVENTION ORDERS

Mr. John O'Toole: I would like to briefly comment on one aspect of Bill 133, the Family Statute Law Amendment Act, 2008. Of course, I'm referring to the use of emergency intervention orders to protect vulnerable spouses, children and family members.

Almost one year ago, December 7, to be exact, I introduced Bill 10, An Act, in memory of Lori Dupont, to better protect victims of domestic violence. It called for the emergency intervention order being available from a designated judge or justice of the peace 24 hours a day.

In reviewing Bill 133, I do not see where the emergency intervention orders are included, and I'm very disappointed. In fact, Bill 133 actually repeals a bill that included emergency intervention orders, the Domestic Violence Protection Act, which was passed by the Harris government in 2000 but never enacted by the McGuinty government.

I'm encouraged by new measures to help those who are at risk. Today is the United Nations' International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. It is a reminder that there's much more to be done.

I would urge this House to consider including the emergency intervention orders as part of Bill 133, or through the passage of my Bill 10, the Lori Dupont Act, and I ask, respectfully, for the House to bring this to the Attorney General's attention.

ROSE OF SHARON LONG-TERM-CARE HOME

Mr. David Zimmer: I want to celebrate an important community initiative. It is the Rose of Sharon long-term-

care home. When it opens on April 1, 2009, the Rose of Sharon long-term-care home will be the first Korean long-term-care home in Canada.

The Rose of Sharon is also known as the flower of eternity. It's the Korean national flower and it embodies the Korean aspiration for peace and prosperity.

This is an ambitious undertaking by the Toronto Korean community. In addition to the 60 resident beds in its long-term-care facility, the Rose Of Sharon long-term-care home will have 90 life-lease apartments. In providing both types of care units, it's clear that this facility values the ability to offer its residents an independent lifestyle.

It's a substantial investment made by the Korean community, and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is pleased to have committed \$2.1 million toward this project.

I'm proud to stand here on behalf of the Korean community and, indeed, all Torontonians who are working tirelessly with the Korean community in the construction of this new facility here in Toronto. It's a magnificent volunteer achievement by the Korean community in Toronto.

TIMERAISER

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm pleased to share with members of the Legislature a unique community event that took place Saturday, November 15 in my riding of Ottawa Centre. Over 400 people gathered together at the Canadian War Museum in support of Timeraiser, an organization that helps non-profit and voluntary organizations, both large and small, to connect with potential volunteers.

Part volunteer fair and part silent art auction, instead of bidding money, 258 people bid their time—the number of hours they are willing to volunteer for an organization of their choice over the next 12 months.

A lot of local organizations from Ottawa participated in this endeavour, such as the AIDS Committee of Ottawa, Big Brothers Big Sisters Ottawa, Citizen Advocacy of Ottawa, Ottawa Riverkeeper, Mothercraft Ottawa and LiveWorkPlay, just to name a few.

Bringing together these organizations with interested community members, I'm pleased to let everyone know that Timeraiser surpassed their goal of raising 5,000 volunteer hours by bringing in over 7,015 hours by the end of the evening. With 25 items up for auction, 19 of them went for the maximum 150 hours.

I want to commend Anil Patel and Jennifer Grebeldinger for their hard work and dedication for creating such a unique event. In addition, I want to recognize some members from the young lawyers division in Ottawa—Juliet Knapton, Heather Fogo, Cheryl Knapp, Alayna Miller, Anthony Moffat, Debora Sarmiento and Lisa Barnet—who worked very hard on this event.

Congratulations to them for organizing the first-ever Timeraiser in Ottawa and for its success in helping many great organizations in our community.

VIC JOHNSTON ARENA

Mr. Bob Delaney: In 1961, the residents of the town of Streetsville pitched in and raised about \$250,000 to build the first indoor arena in Peel county. It was completed on time and within budget.

In the 1960s, Vic Johnston was the chair of the Parks Board in the town of Streetsville. In 1973, a testimonial dinner in his honour was held and the Streetsville Arena was renamed after Vic.

On November 24, in Streetsville, the Vic Johnston arena formally reopened after a major \$8-million expansion and renovation, once again completed on time and within budget.

Congratulations to the board of the Vic Johnston Arena: Myles Robinson, Steve Stone, Jim Gray, Todd Ladner, Ken Hunter, Dave Moss, Mike Vassalo and Todd Smith. They raised \$1 million in just nine months to get the project going.

Those who learned and played their hockey at Vic Johnston from the 1960s through to the 21st century made memories on the ice surface and with their teammates. Those experiences serve them today, serve them in working with others, reaching beyond their day-to-day abilities and finding something special, being part of a team and learning how to contribute and how to lead.

Today's donors wanted to pass along these priceless character treasures to the generations to come who can now play hockey in a modern state-of-the-art facility.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ABLE INSURANCE BROKERS LTD. ACT,
2008

Mr. Dhillon moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr19, An Act to revive Able Insurance Brokers Ltd.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

NIAGARA HEALTH SYSTEM
ELECTIONS ACT, 2008LOI DE 2008 SUR LES ÉLECTIONS
AU SEIN DU SYSTÈME
DE SANTÉ DE NIAGARA

Mr. Kormos moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 134, An Act to provide for the election of members of the board of trustees of the Niagara Health System / Projet de loi 134, Loi prévoyant l'élection des membres du conseil d'administration du Système de santé de Niagara.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Peter Kormos: The bill provides that at least 12 of the trustees of the Niagara Health System are to be elected to represent the area municipalities of the regional municipality of Niagara.

PETITIONS

DIABETES TREATMENT

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition that reads:

"Whereas elementary school-aged children in the province of Ontario suffering from diabetes require regular blood sugar monitoring and may also require insulin and glucagon to manage their disease; and

"Whereas there is no medical or nursing assistance readily available in schools as there was in the past; and

"Whereas the parents/guardians of these children must currently visit their children's schools "several times throughout the day in order to test their child's blood sugar levels; and

"Whereas the absence of medical support in our elementary schools results in substantial stress and disruption to the lives of children and their working parents;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) That elementary schools in the province of Ontario have on-site staff trained in the daily monitoring of blood sugar levels of children who suffer from diabetes; and

"(2) That the trained staff also administer insulin and glucagon when required, with the consent of the child's parent/guardian."

As I agree with the contents of this petition, I affix my name thereto.

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AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Peter Kormos: I have a petition to fund autism treatment.

"Many children in the Niagara region diagnosed with autism are currently being denied appropriate treatment because of a shortfall in provincial funding.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario for immediate and full funding for all of these children."

There are thousands of signatures and I've affixed mine as well.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from constituents from my riding.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents.

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and sent it to the clerks' table.

PROTECTION FOR MINERS

M^{me} France G  linas: "Whereas the current legislation contained in the Ontario health and safety act and regulations for mines and mining plants does not adequately protect the lives of miners, we request revisions to the act;

"Lyle Everett Defoe and the scoop tram he was operating fell 150 feet down an open stope (July 23, 2007). Lyle was 25 years and 15 days old when he was killed at Xstrata Kidd Creek mine site, Timmins.

"Section R-60 (page 60 of Mining Regulations), paragraph 74 states that, 'A shaft, raise or other opening in an underground mine shall be securely fenced, covered or otherwise guarded. RRO 1990, Reg. 854s 75(1).' The stope where Lyle was killed was protected by a length of orange plastic snow fence and a rope with a warning sign. These barriers would not have been visible if the bucket of the scoop tram was raised. Lyle's body was recovered from behind the scoop tram.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Concrete berms must be mandatory to protect all open stopes and raises;

"All miners and contractors working underground must have working communication devices and personal locators;

"All equipment involved in injuries and fatalities must be recovered and examined unless such recovery would endanger the lives of others; and

"The entire act must be reviewed and amended to better protect underground workers."

This petition is signed by the people of Englehart. I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk with Courtney.

GTA POOLING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition that was mailed to me by Ljilja Pantic of Argyle Road in Mississauga. It is addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and it is titled "End GTA Pooling." It reads as follows:

"Whereas the city of Mississauga faces a long-term labour shortage, resulting in some 60,000 more people commuting into the city of Mississauga than leave Mississauga to earn their living and support their families each and every day; and

"Whereas 10 years ago the Ontario government of that day introduced the concept of GTA pooling, whereby funds are taken from the municipalities surrounding the city of Toronto and channelled into the city of Toronto without benefit or accountability to the taxpayers of those fast-growing cities, which face big-city needs and issues of their own; and

"Whereas GTA pooling places an additional tax burden on the municipal property tax bases of some \$40 million each and every year to the city of Mississauga; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario in its 2007-08 budget proposes to completely eliminate GTA pooling during a seven-year span beginning in fiscal year 2007-08, and that, as pooling is phased out, Ontario will take responsibility for social assistance and social housing costs currently funded by GTA pooling;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That all parties within the government of Ontario support the swift passage of the 2007-08 Ontario budget and ensure that its provisions ending GTA pooling are implemented."

To that I can only say amen. I affix my signature to it and I'm going to ask my page from Mississauga—Streetsville, Jason Fernandes, to carry it.

INNISFIL EARLY YEARS CENTRE

Mr. John O'Toole: I'll try to be much briefer.

"Whereas on September 15, 2008, Simcoe Community Services announced that due to lack of funding by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the Ontario Early Years Centre Innisfil satellite location located at 8000 Yonge Street in Innisfil, Ontario, will be closing on November 30, 2008"—shortly;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We respectfully request that the province of Ontario and its funding partners take any and all means necessary to provide an adequate level of funding on a consistent, ongoing basis to Simcoe Community Services for the purpose of keeping the Ontario Early Years Centre Innisfil satellite location open to the parents, caregivers and children of the town of Innisfil and surrounding communities."

As a parent, I am pleased to support this and sign it and present it to Jenna.

TUITION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from the student's association at Laurentian University:

"Whereas undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario have increased by 195% since 1990 and are the third-highest in all of the provinces in Canada; and

"Whereas average student debt in Ontario has skyrocketed by 250% in the last 15 years to over \$25,000 for four years of study; and

"Whereas international students pay three to four times more for the same education, and domestic students in professional programs such as law or medicine pay as much tuition as \$20,000 per year; and

"Whereas 70% of new jobs require post-secondary education, and fees reduce the opportunity for many low- and middle-income families while magnifying barriers for aboriginal, rural, racialized and other marginalized students; and

"Whereas Ontario currently provides the lowest per capita funding for post-secondary education in Canada, while many countries fully fund higher education and charge little or no fees for college and university; and

"Whereas public opinion polls show that nearly three quarters of Ontarians think the government's Reaching Higher framework for tuition fee increases of 20% to 36% over four years is unfair;"

We petition the assembly as follows:

"(1) Reduce tuition and ancillary fees annually for students.

"(2) Convert a portion of every student loan into a grant.

"(3) Increase per student funding above the national average."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk's table with Sahara.

RAILROAD BRIDGE

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition is addressed to the Parliament of Ontario, the Minister of Transportation and, it says here, the mayor of Toronto:

"Whereas Bloor Street West between Lansdowne Avenue and Dundas Street West has been identified as the only stretch of Bloor Street that has no landscaping;

"Whereas the neighbourhood near 1369 Bloor Street West has been recognized as a priority revitalization area by a city of Toronto study in 2000;

"Whereas items for beautification include:

"(1) Developing terraced walls with flowers and planters near the railroad bridge;

"(2) Constructing new abutment walls;

"(3) Cleaning, painting and reconstructing the rusty, dilapidated railroad bridge; and

"(4) Creating brightly lit murals underneath the bridge in order to make it more secure and more people-friendly;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, request in the strongest possible terms that our province and our city government immediately reactivate the 2000 reconstruction plan and CNR immediately proceed with improvements to this bridge.

"We look forward to a dynamic, revitalized community enhanced by a beautiful continuous cityscape. We want to be proud to live here."

Since I agree, I'm delighted to sign this petition and I'm asking you to support it as well.

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INNISFIL EARLY YEARS CENTRE

Mrs. Julia Munro: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas on September 15, 2008, Simcoe Community Services announced that due to lack of funding by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the Ontario Early Years Centre Innisfil satellite location located at 8000 Yonge Street in Innisfil, Ontario, will be closing on November 30, 2008;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We respectfully request that the province of Ontario and its funding partners take any and all means necessary to provide an adequate level of funding on a consistent, ongoing basis to Simcoe Community Services for the purpose of keeping the Ontario Early Years Centre Innisfil satellite location open to the parents, caregivers and children of the town of Innisfil and surrounding communities."

As I am in favour of this, I have affixed my signature, and give it to page Sarah.

HOSPICES

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas hospices on church or hospital property do not pay taxes;

"Whereas hospices are not-for-profit organizations providing emotional, spiritual and bereavement support and respite care to terminally ill individuals and their family members;

"Whereas a residential hospice (usually an eight- to 10-bed home-like facility) provides around-the-clock care to terminally ill individuals and support to their families;

"Whereas hospice services are ... free of charge;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow hospices across the province to be exempt from municipal taxes."

I agree with this petition and will send it to the table with Sahara.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Ms. Laurie Scott: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario is introducing a policy of forcing sole proprietors, partners, executive officers in a corporation and independent operators in construction to pay workers' compensation premiums on their own earnings in addition to the premiums they already pay on behalf of their employees; and

"Whereas such a policy will inflict an additional \$11,000 average cost to law-abiding business owners in the above-ground economy while doing nothing to root out the law-evading cheaters in the underground economy; and

"Whereas such a policy will not improve access to workplace health and safety education and training since law-abiding businesses already have access to all of these resources and law-evading businesses will continue to hide; and

"Whereas such a policy is not needed to level the playing field, since the rules already require that firms large and small must cover employees, while company leaders are exempt in both cases; and

"Whereas there has been no serious review of alternatives such as tracking who has coverage by name to limit abuse and other insurance options; and

"Whereas such a policy could be extended beyond construction to other sectors; and

"Whereas Ontario's slowing economy is hurting citizens and businesses, also resulting in Ontario becoming a first-time 'have-not' province;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To vote against or repeal any legislation that requires independent operators, executive officers in a corporation, sole proprietors and partners in construction or in any other sector to pay WSIB premiums on their own earnings."

I want to thank the CFIB in my riding in Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock for getting these signatures.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: "Whereas the Rouge Valley Health board of directors has recently approved closing the 20-bed mental health patient unit at the Ajax-Pickering hospital," and they have been moved out of Ajax to Centenary hospital as of last Friday;

"Whereas there remains further concern by residents for future maternity/pediatric closings, particularly with the new birthing unit at Centenary hospital" and "new labour/delivery/recovery and postpartum (LDRP)

birthing rooms and an additional 21 postpartum rooms opening this fall ... even with the Ontario Ministry of Health's largest-ever expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas there is a natural boundary, the Rouge Valley, that clearly separates the two distinct areas of Scarborough and Durham region;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Central East Local Health Integration Network (CE-LHIN) and the Rouge Valley Health System (RVHS) board of directors review the Rouge Valley Health System makeup and group Scarborough Centenary hospital with the three other Scarborough hospitals; and

"Further, that we position Ajax-Pickering hospital within Lakeridge Health, thus combining all of our hospitals in Durham region under one Durham region administration."

I affix my signature to this and will pass it to Samiha.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that, pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House, when the order of the day is called for resuming the adjourned debate on government order number 14, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the motion and any amendments thereto, which questions shall be decided without further debate or amendment; and

That, except in the case of a recorded division arising from morning orders of the day, pursuant to standing order 9(c), no deferral of any vote shall be permitted; and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on government order number 14, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The deputy government House Leader, Ms. Smith, has moved government notice of motion number 92.

The deputy government House Leader.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: As many know, we are moving forward with the motion that the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs begin its deliberations and conduct pre-budget consultations in the very near future.

These consultations would normally have taken place in late January. However, given the economic circumstances we presently face, Ontarians want to hear from their government and also want to have the opportunity to speak to their government about the concerns they have around the economy.

As the members of this House will recall, members opposite spent two hours of debate only four short weeks ago discussing the need for a select committee on the

economy to go out and discuss the state of the economy with the people of Ontario. Today we find them actually not wanting to go out to the people of Ontario and having that discussion. It seems passing strange that the official opposition has changed its position when the circumstances in the province have, in fact, not changed and may perhaps have worsened.

I note, as one of my colleagues pointed out for the record, that it is the official opposition that has taken this position and not the third party. We look forward to working with the third party and having this standing committee travel the province, hopefully in early December. Members of the standing committee should be out there and should be hearing from the public.

The Minister of Finance, who undertakes his own pre-budget consultations, has undertaken them earlier than planned this year.

Every year, as members of the House would know, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs does table a report in this House. Oftentimes that report is tabled mere days prior to delivery of the budget. We would like the people of Ontario to have the opportunity to have real and substantial input to the deliberation of this year's budget, particularly during these difficult times. We feel it is important that our Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs get out into the field and have those discussions in December, as we propose and as the third party agrees to. For some mysterious reason known only to them, the official opposition has chosen to stand in the way of this progress. I look forward to hearing from them as to why they've taken this position, and to further debate this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? The member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, close; he looks a lot like me.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I'm so used to the member from Durham. I'm sorry. The member for Oxford

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Today the McGuinty government has found a new way to lessen democracy in Ontario. They have actually moved closure so they can limit debate on their motion to reduce pre-budget consultations because they don't want to hear the criticisms about their lack of consultation.

The McGuinty government seems to have forgotten that we are here to represent the people of Ontario, and that means the government must consult and listen to those people. Traditionally, these consultations have taken place during the winter break. It involves several weeks of travelling around the province to hear directly from people, businesses and organizations about what is working and what the government needs to fix. But the McGuinty government is far too comfortable sitting in their ivory tower in Toronto and telling those people what they should do instead of listening to them.

The members of the McGuinty cabinet have demonstrated over and over that they don't know what is going on with the average Ontarian. The priorities of this gov-

ernment are not the priorities of the people of Ontario. The government showed how disconnected they are from average Ontarians with last fall's economic statement. Across Ontario, people were hoping that the government would be announcing a new plan to try to save businesses and keep jobs in Ontario. Instead, the McGuinty government announced they had spent their way into a deficit, and they are continuing on the same, ineffective economic strategy. They still will not acknowledge that that strategy isn't working. Their current strategy has led to plant closures, layoffs and Ontario becoming a have-not province.

1540

These are the reasons that pre-budget consultations are more important than ever. Instead of going out and listening to the people of Ontario, instead of expanding pre-budget consultations to do an even better job in these difficult times, the government is limiting the opportunity to hear from Ontarians by reducing the number of pre-budget hearings and trying to sneak them in during the week just before Christmas. Now they've moved closure so they can't even have a real debate about the shortened pre-budget consultations.

Merry Christmas, Ontario, from the McGuinty government. The government wants to hold hearings in the week before Christmas. That means while people are finishing their Christmas shopping, planning Christmas dinner or attending their kids' Christmas pageants, the government is hoping that they can hold very limited consultations and no one will notice. They're hoping the holiday music will cover the legitimate complaints from the people of Ontario.

The government seems to believe that if you rush through the consultations, no one will point out that our manufacturing sector is in trouble, our people are losing their jobs and our farmers are losing their farms. The members on the opposite side don't seem to be aware of the reality that is facing Ontarians. People are losing their jobs. They're worried about how they're going to pay their mortgage and put food on the table. They're worried about how to explain to the kids that there won't be presents at Christmas this year and they can't afford to send the kids to hockey or dance class.

That's the reality in Ontario today, whether the members on the other side want to hear it or not, a reality that the people of this province are dealing with every day. No matter how much the government tries to limit debate and consultation, it won't change the reality in Ontario. People in Ontario are in trouble and they're scared about the future. Young people don't know where they're going to get a job. People who have one are worried that it will disappear and they won't be able to find another.

Every day, it seems another manufacturing plant announces that it's closing its doors: in my riding just recently, DDM Plastics in Tillsonburg, Lafarge cement in Zorra township and layoffs at Cami Automotive in Ingersoll. Every year I hear about farmers who can't pay their feed bills or are losing their farm because this government chose to give payments to retired and deceased

farmers instead of to the young farmers who desperately need help. These are farmers who are contributing to the economy, buying feed and equipment and hiring people in our rural communities, but soon to be the latest people in the unemployment line in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario.

I can assure you that those farmers would love to participate in pre-budget hearings. They would love a chance to tell this government about the problems the Minister of Agriculture has created. A real government, a real leader, would acknowledge these problems. They would listen to people who are scared of losing their jobs, to a small business man who is struggling to keep the doors open and to the farmer who needs government help. A real government and a real leader would want more hearings, more information, so they could find a solution and a way to help these people.

That is why our party introduced an amendment to expand pre-budget consultations, to hold them in the months of January and February so we can advertise them properly and give people the proper time to prepare. I'm very pleased to support that amendment.

A few weeks ago, when thousands of students came to Queen's Park because they were concerned about tuition levels, our critic for training, colleges and universities for the PC Party was out there speaking to them. The NDP were there, but once again the government members chose to hide inside Queen's Park and ignore the people they claim to represent. Now the government is trying to force unfair driving restrictions on many of those same students and is refusing to listen to them. A motion to limit pre-budget consultations and now the closure motion are just the latest examples of the McGuinty government trying to shut out democracy and the voice of the people.

Every time they run up against a problem, they try to bury their heads in the sand, cut down consultation and hope it will go away. We saw it in the last few weeks with Bill 119: As soon as they realized this bill would burden small business owners with huge costs, and those owners were upset, the government used their majority to force it through with almost no consultation. On Bill 114, the amendments to the bill were due before the consultations actually began. How much can anyone feel their input matters when it's already too late to solve the problem before it's pointed out?

In 2004, the Minister of Finance, who was the government House leader at the time, boasted about the extensive consultations that they were undertaking. In their first throne speech, this government talked about the ideas they were going to take to the people. In a few short years, they've lost the ideals that they claimed to have. They no longer want debate or to hear from Ontarians.

A few weeks ago, that same minister said that the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs allows an opportunity to deal with the economic challenges. Now, instead of letting the committee hold full hearings to investigate the topic, they are trying to limit these hearings and slip them through just before Christmas. They have become so entwined with special interest

groups and union bosses that they have forgotten who they are here to represent.

We are here to represent the 21-year-old who is car-pooling to work with her friends, trying to save money for the future, who under Bill 126 will no longer be able to get to her job. We are here for the many small business owners in my riding who have been working so hard to support their families, but with Bill 119 are going to see all their profits go to the WSIB. We are here for the thousands of people who have lost their jobs because their plants can no longer be competitive in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. Those are the people we were elected to represent. Those are the people that this government needs to hear from in the pre-budget consultations.

I urge the government not to cut pre-budget consultations short. Don't try to bury them in the busy week just before Christmas. Instead, take this opportunity to go out and listen to the people who are in trouble and, for once, make this budget about them, instead of making it about rewarding special interest groups. Make this budget about developing a jobs plan and really helping the people and businesses of Ontario so that, together, we can all be strong and Ontario can lead this country once again.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: I stand here, as I have every time for 86 months in a row, to oppose a government closure motion. It's not that I don't understand what the government is trying to do, but in this place I believe in democracy. I believe in allowing bills and motions to take their normal course. I understand the government's need to move on this quickly, but it would, in any event, have been accomplished had we allowed debate today and tomorrow. It is simply closing one full day of debate.

I do note for the record, and I think it's very clear for anyone who checks Hansard, that there have been no additional speeches made by the New Democratic Party since I made the first speech and my colleague from Trinity-Spadina gave a two-minuter. There have been no additional speeches from the government benches. The speeches have been confined to those of the Progressive Conservative official opposition.

Having said that, I don't know how much more—except to hear some more Conservative speeches—would have been accomplished. We would have concluded, in any event, by tomorrow. The full eight hours or whatever is required under the standing rules would have been met.

I cannot vote for closure. Having said that, I think I need to reiterate for the record why I supported the government motion in the first place.

Mr. John O'Toole: This is a leadership speech.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, this is not a leadership speech. This is a speech for this House.

The subcommittee met, the subcommittee and a majority, being the Liberal member Mr. Arthurs from Pickering-Scarborough East and my colleague from—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, you weren't there—my colleague Mr. Hudak from Niagara West—Glanbrook and I sat there, and we came to a conclusion, although my colleague from Niagara West—Glanbrook said his Conservative caucus may not agree to it, that we were going to meet during that week. That was the discussion: the best possible week to accommodate all of the members on the travels around Ontario. There was some discussion about going in January and it was problematic. It was problematic for the members, but it was also problematic for the process that is about to unfold.

We know in this province that we are going through a period of tremendous economic turmoil. We know that we are not alone. That same phenomenon is taking place across Canada, and indeed across North America and the world. We know that we need to work together as a government and opposition in order to do that which is absolutely best for the people of this province. We need to get out there, and we need to get out there early, in order to plan and try to have a coherent and consistent policy to weather this storm, to try to save jobs in Ontario, to try to create jobs in Ontario.

1550

I am reminded that just a little more than two weeks ago I stood in this very House and argued passionately for the motion at that time to set up an all-party select committee to do exactly the same because, notwithstanding the merits of what the government or the official opposition is trying to do and the methodology by which they are attempting to do it, the final analysis is that I believe we all need to work together for the people of this province. We all need to come together in a common goal to try to find out what the people want and then try to move in that direction for the benefit of everyone.

The argument has been made that this is being held under cover of darkness and is being done just before Christmas. I would hesitate to say that this is being done under cover of darkness. This has been advertised on the parliamentary channels, at least in Toronto, and it will be advertised on the parliamentary channels and in the newspapers and everything else, as set out in the subcommittee report.

Because the finance committee does not require the authority of the House because we are meeting in session, we've already held one meeting on November 20. We will hold two additional meetings, one on December 4 and one on December 11, to hear people who make application in the Toronto area. We received more than 80 applications for 51 spots in a matter of days. We had to, as a parliamentary committee, go through those and determine which 51 we would hear and which 29 we could not hear. That was a difficult process, and we did it. There are many more groups wanting to make deputations than is possible to be heard.

There is also the very thorny issue of when the budget is going to come down. I am not privy to the actual date, but I take the finance minister in Ontario at his word that he would like to bring down the budget towards the end of February or the very beginning of March. He feels it is

necessary and incumbent upon him to do so because of the turmoil in the markets, the turmoil in the economy and his efforts to try to get a handle on it before year-end, and I understand. I am the finance critic. If I were sitting on that side of the House and in that chair, I would probably be trying to do the same thing. You do not want to bring down a budget in such trying circumstances after March 31, because whatever direction the government takes will be compressed into the 11, 10 or nine months, or whatever time there is in the balance of the year so that if cuts do have to be made, then it is microscoped into that period and made to be much worse. If help has to be done, you have to wait for months when you may not want to wait those months or to give the monies that are necessary. I understand all of that.

I also understand—and we've read in the paper in the last couple of days—that the finance minister of Canada is going to come down with his budget in the first week of March. He too is not waiting until the end of March or into the new fiscal year, but it's coming down at the beginning of March.

That being the case, I don't know how the finance committee, of which I have been a member these many years, can reasonably be expected to meet to hear the deputations, to make the motions, to have the documents translated, to present what we need to to the Minister of Finance to have it considered in time for the budget—to do all of that—if we do not go on the road in December. That was part of our discussion. That's what we discussed. I was party to it, and I'm going to stand here and say that I was in agreement with what was done.

I listened intently to the motion, the amendment, made by my colleagues. With the greatest of respect, I understand that they want to go in January or February. I understand that and, if that were the lone motion, I probably wouldn't be standing here. But they also, in that motion, requested that the finance committee visit 19 locations in and around Ontario. I would love to visit 19 locations, but the travel involved and the difficulties in going to 19 locations would involve—I would hesitate, without—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, it would take more than 19 working days. It would take more than four weeks, possibly five weeks. If we were to start, as they suggest, in February, and spend five weeks on the road getting the information, then we could not have the meeting to make the motions. We could not advise the minister. The budget would have come and gone. It just couldn't happen.

I am at a loss. I cannot accept the Conservative motion. I understand, and I will stand up and say what we did in the budget committee and in the subcommittee was right. Now I have a closure motion which I cannot possibly vote for because I don't believe that closure was the right thing to do. I invite the government members to do whatever you think you need to do, but I will not be party to it. I invite the Conservatives to continue with their motion, but I will not vote for that. I will vote in favour if there is a separate motion to confirm the recommendations that the budget committee and the subcommittee

that reported to it made. I consider that they were right, I consider they are just and in the best interests of the people of this province, and that they can reasonably be accomplished to hear the people in the five locations: one in Niagara, one in southwestern Ontario, one in northwestern Ontario, one in northeastern Ontario, one in eastern Ontario and three in Toronto. That seems to me to be reasonable given the circumstances, the timing and the necessity of acting quickly so that we can advise the minister in time for the end-of-February or beginning-of-March budget.

Having said that, I will cede the floor to my other colleagues. I hope that someone can elucidate in this debate and talk precisely not about what is happening in the economy and what bills are not before the House and what bills should be, but in fact why it makes or doesn't make sense for us to meet that week, from December 14 to 19, because I think that is in fact the entire issue here.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'm just looking at the clock so I have some sense of our time allocation during today's debate.

Let me say I very much appreciate the comments by Mr. Prue, the member from—I always forget the riding. Beaches–East York; I should know that by now. I appreciate the position that he finds himself in at this point in time.

Yesterday, during the course of the debate on our motion, there did come forward a motion that the question now be put, in essence to achieve, I think, what he was asking for in that the motion spoke to the specifics of our travel and scheduling. Unfortunately, with respect to the Speaker, the Speaker chose at that point in time to suggest that debate hadn't continued sufficiently for the purposes of the minority to have their voices heard. So we are left today with a time allocation motion, because there are constraints within all of these operations and the ability, subject to this Legislature giving approvals, for the work that needs to be done to prepare for that week to happen. That work can't proceed at this point in the absence of this Legislature bringing some conclusion, some determination, to what that might mean.

I want to talk about, obviously, December 15 to 19 as appropriate times for us to be travelling and what that will accomplish in comparison to what the official opposition, in particular, in this case has spoken to as non-desirable, in the alternative wanting to travel, instead of that time and the locations identified, in January and/or February, by their amendment to some 19 locations or, in the absence of that, travel in January or February to some number of locations.

I just want to draw a reference to what we're doing this year by virtue of the subcommittee report and what we've already initiated, although this week of the 15th to the 19th is still in play.

We have allocated eight days of hearings for the purpose of pre-budget consultations, three of those in Toronto and five of those on the road. Last year, when we

met in late January/February, we had six days on the road, and I believe I recall either two days or, at the most, three days in Toronto. In essence, we had the same number of days of hearings and, for all practical purposes, we covered much of the same in the context of Toronto and other locations within the province of Ontario. So from that standpoint, we are seeking out the advice of Ontarians in this year toward the development of the budget very much the same as we sought out the advice of Ontarians last year and, I would suggest, even over the past couple of years.

1600

During our time—and the member from Beaches–East York spoke about our Toronto hearings—we will hear from, give or take one or two, depending on if we have a no-show, 50 individuals and organizations. Most of those will be organizations of a great variety of sorts who will seek out information from us. We will seek from them information on what the budget should look like, what the priorities should be for the province's budget, what the Minister of Finance should take under consideration.

Yesterday, during the debate on this matter, I had the opportunity to speak to some of the deputations or witnesses who have already spoken to us and what their priorities were. During our five days proposed at this point in time, at up to 24 a day, we expect we will come close to reaching that in all of those locations because of the nature of them. They're regional locations in geography and people can get to them and there's a broad interest. So I'm suggesting that we're going to hear somewhere between 100 and 120 additional Ontarian organizations and individuals about what they see as priorities that the minister should be considering in the development and finalization of his budget. That will be some 150 Ontario individuals and organizations inputting from across this province into the budgetary process.

I would venture to say that after 150 we're unlikely to hear something so substantively different in additional hearing days that it would influence the minister to modify or develop his budget outside of that broad framework. There is a point in time, I think, when you are hearing from witnesses across the province where you've gathered as much cogent information, important information, consolidated information focused on key priorities that you can present back to the minister for his or her consideration—in this case his consideration. Does 200 make more sense than 150? If one multiplies the 19 days proposed by the 24 that we might hear in each day, we're in the neighbourhood of some 400 witnesses. I don't think that 400 witnesses are going to provide us with that much different information than 150 will.

If we're only hearing five, I'm going to make the argument that you haven't tested the marketplace in a substantive enough way to really get the views of the people of Ontario, and maybe if you only sample 10. But there is a sort of statistical analysis one might do to say, at what point are you getting the information that people want to feed back to us and back to the minister? I would argue that at 150 or thereabouts we're at a point in time where

we've reached a broad scope of people across this province from one corner to the other, as well as a focus here in the large metropolitan area of Toronto, that we will have gathered sufficient and significant information from the people of Ontario, from those individuals and organizations who want to present to us.

Based on our prior experience, six, seven, eight, nine days—one year it might be eight, one year it might be seven, one year it might be nine—have been deemed to be sufficient for that purpose. This is a different economic climate, but that doesn't change the fact that we have to gather information we can use. It doesn't change that we're going to get a broad cross-section of information. It doesn't change that 150 organizations are going to be able to give us, individually and collectively, a good sense of what we should be asking of the minister in the context of developing his budget when it comes to priorities.

The budgetary process for the most part, this pre-consultation process, doesn't necessarily drive individual requests that the minister will always put into play. So it's not a matter of hearing from 400 witnesses so we can find the one we missed that the minister is actually going to include in that budget. Written submissions can achieve the same end. We're not restricting. If we get 1,000 written submissions—you don't have to present to the committee—then those will all be built into the process of the report-writing, and the staff will be driven crazy on that. We don't expect that to happen, but it doesn't preclude that.

I would suggest that the five days we set aside put us on the road in a concentrated fashion at a time where people are thinking about the economy and are thinking about next year's budget, which allows us to complete that work and allows the minister to complete his work. As the member from Beaches–East York said, whether the budget is in late February, early March or later March, our experience of past years is that it certainly has been during the fiscal year, and I wouldn't expect that to necessarily change this year.

I'm anxious for us to complete our Toronto hearings in the two remain days we have set aside for that, and then immediately be on road for five days so we can hear from the people of Ontario. I'm anxious to see this debate conclude so that, subject to the decision of this Legislature, if it's positive at the end of the day, the committee clerk and his team can go to work on the necessary preparations to make sure we can actually be at those locations at the times we have proposed.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm kind of sad that we're up here debating closure of debate on the amendment by my colleague from Niagara West–Glanbrook, who wanted to take the pre-budget hearings out to some of the communities in Ontario instead of putting all the committees before Christmas.

In his amendment, he put that they not meet “during the week of December 15” but “during the months of

January and/or February,” and then listed a bunch of communities they would like to go to, one of which is Lindsay, in my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. Each of the communities that my colleague from Niagara West–Glanbrook mentioned in his amendment certainly deserves the opportunity to be heard, and I certainly appreciate that Lindsay was there.

I think it's also important to bring up the fact that when the Minister of Tourism got up today to tell us what we would be debating, she said that we, as the official opposition, were standing in the way of progress in this debate. Yesterday she was in the Legislature and tried to shut down debate on the amendment, part of which I just read. She thankfully was ruled out of order, but nice try.

We're not trying to shut down debate. We're trying to take committee work out for a longer period of time—the usual that we do in January and February—not hide it under the cover of Christmas and the holiday season. We want to hear from the people of Ontario properly.

Time allocation, which is closure of debate in other language, is not fair. Quoting the Minister of Finance, when he was in opposition in 2003, “Personally, I would like to see a lot more work done in committee. There are examples in the Commonwealth, in Australia and Great Britain, where in my view committee work is much more important. Hopefully we will have the goodwill in this House to find those opportunities.” Well, they're taking those opportunities away. How soon they forget once they get into government.

Because they aren't coming to the town of Lindsay or to my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, I thought I would just highlight quickly a few of the topics that a lot of people would have shared with them had they decided to go there. For example, the county of Haliburton now has the lowest household income in the province of Ontario—tough times up there. Agriculture is the largest economic driver of the city of Kawartha Lakes; it's second in the whole province, but it's the largest economic driver in my city of Kawartha Lakes. They are facing huge crises, especially in the hog and beef industries at the moment—the pork and hog farmers were here this week—and they don't know what to do. They don't know what the solution is. They've had some federal loans that have taken them for a year. There has been nothing for long-term income stabilization from government. Do you want them to stay farming; do you not want them to stay in farming?

We hosted a round table up in Lindsay, at the new Lindsay agricultural exhibition grounds, with my colleague from Oxford, Mr. Hardeman, who is the critic for agriculture. There are some serious concerns in agriculture out there, and they do have some solutions. We've got to figure out how to keep them going. We never want to lose the ability to feed ourselves. Especially since we're demanding such regulations upon them and they're producing the highest quality food that we have, we certainly need to offer them more supports.

1610

The city of Kawartha Lakes actually did an impact study in 2006, and it was the sixth-biggest community in

Ontario in beef cow numbers. We've got two family/independently owned dairy processing operations. I know that everyone here has heard of Kawartha Dairy ice cream, which you can also buy in Toronto now, and the difficulties that they are facing right now. We have a great goat milk processing plant at Mariposa Dairy, which is just doing a tremendous job in our area.

The capital value of the city of Kawartha Lakes' farms is \$773 million.

Another big factor in our riding is tourism. I'd say that most of you have enjoyed the beauty of the city of Kawartha Lakes and the rest of the riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. We certainly have a lot of tourism up there. They've had a very soft summer, very much cutting into their revenues. How may they survive? They have got some ideas and initiatives they'd like to see brought forward for the province of Ontario, but specifically for Kawartha Lakes, using the Trent-Severn waterway. My colleague from Peterborough is hopefully meeting with his federal counterpart, whether by phone—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Tomorrow.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Tomorrow, he tells me, which is good.

MPs and MPPs from all parties are trying to capitalize on that jewel of the Trent-Severn waterway that we have through the riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock and many of our surrounding ridings.

Manufacturing: Certainly, the losses at GM are affecting my riding. At one point, it was the largest private employer in the riding. I think I have more retired GM workers now than actual workers at GM. The spinoff affects many of our ridings. The suppliers, the related businesses, the restaurants on the corners, are all affected.

One of my suppliers, Devour Technologies in Omemee, was certainly trying to look to expand their business, and they hit roadblocks. They employ so many people and are such good employers.

I spoke to Gerry McKeown and Gayle Jones at the Lindsay and District Chamber of Commerce, which represents 600 business members and their 7,000 employees, and they said point-blank, "Wow, if the government holds pre-budget meetings in Lindsay, we'll fill a room and keep the agenda more than full for the committee." They have done some real work in their local economy and have put their concerns forward in the chamber. They gave a deputation to the city of Kawartha Lakes council just a few days ago regarding a survey in which 54% said lack of economic development was a huge problem for the businesses there and 13.5% said red tape regulations are holding them back. So the chamber is really concerned with those challenges that are occurring today in the market and the economic forecasting.

I have limited time left, but I can't pass up this opportunity yet again to comment on the negative impact that the WSIB legislation that was rammed through the Legislature today is going to have on my small businesses. I read some of the petitions that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business from my riding has put together.

We tried and tried to tell the government—first of all, we don't need the legislation; workers are covered; there are private insurance choices out there; WSIB doesn't have to be mandatory. When small businesses are struggling to stay alive and you're putting this tax grab on them, which is totally unfair, and they're being portrayed as bad business owners and breaking the law, that is absolutely not true.

The Clean Water Act, which was a massive concern in my communities, is still hugely on the radar screen. When I go to my community events—the potential financial disputes that they look like they are having—they shake their heads and say, "Why would the government do this to us?"

I'm sure the member for Peterborough agrees with me that we need the rail link that's going to go between Peterborough and Toronto. That's certainly an initiative that needs to be moved forward.

The expansion of four-laning of Highway 35 and the 407 link to the 35/115—huge stimulus for our area. Environmental assessments are all set up for that. Things are moving, things are done, but we have to help.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Jim Bradley is on top of that.

Ms. Laurie Scott: The member from Peterborough says the Minister of Transportation is on top of that. I'm going to hold him to that. I hope he is.

We'd like you to come to Lindsay for the pre-budget committee hearings.

I just want to make a note that the Olympic torch is making its way and stopping in the riding of Kawartha Lakes, but we can't seem to get the finance committee to come to Lindsay.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I can't tell you how pleased I am to rise today and speak to the time allocation motion. One of the things I wanted to talk about was the fact that I had the privilege of being a part of SCFEA for four years during the first term. As a new member, I thought it was really important to be given that opportunity because you really did have the opportunity to hear from all the different parts of Ontario, and the different concerns, because certainly the concerns vary from the north, from the south to the east and to the west. It really does give you a bird's-eye view of what the concerns and the needs are of the people of Ontario.

What we're talking about today, just to refresh people's memories, is SCFEA going out—and SCFEA is the acronym for the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. This motion will give them to opportunity to go out and talk to the people of Ontario.

I really do feel that it's an important process. I know that in the past, the previous Mike Harris/Eves government—I know that the members here are standing in the House and talking about a time allocation motion, which is appropriate, but their memories are short.

Interjection: Very short.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Very short. And I must say that it really needs to be said. You would hardly remember

that this was the same group that brought forward the Magna budget. The Magna budget was certainly one that the people of Ontario talked about. So I see the members standing in the House today and talking about the ability to go out and talk. That's what we're doing, that's what we have done and that is what we continue to do. But you have to ask yourself: How could they, as former members, agree to the Magna budget, which took the budget right out of the Legislature? Right out. Where were the people of Ontario? Were they on the press buses? I don't think so. I can tell you this, and I think it's important: You got into that by invitation only. And who got those invitations? I can tell you—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Durham on a point of order.

Mr. John O'Toole: On a point of order: Standing order, I think, 47—the member has to stay on topic, and this is about a time allocation motion. About previous activities outside of the House here you can speak to the press.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): That is a point of order, and I'm listening very carefully to every member as they speak today.

The member for Huron—Bruce.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I guess we're just a little touchy over on that side today, but I think that this is what we are talking about: the ability to go out and talk to the people of Ontario. I know from that side of the House, quite frankly, they're not interested in talking about what happened in the past.

Interjection.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: But it is. It's what and how they treated the people of Ontario. By having the ability to go out and talk and listen, that's how we come forward with plans that speak to the people. It is so important. I can tell you that the first SCFEA meeting I went to, I was quite astounded by the lack of understanding by the previous government. It wasn't just me who thought that; it was the presenters. One after another came forward and they talked about the concerns, how their voices had not been heard. We heard from a number of presenters that they could not come and talk to their elected members. So I know that you know around our area we have a little saying for that—as we have a saying for a lot of things—but I'm not going to say what that is because I firmly believe that there is a time and a place for that. But I want to remind the members and encourage them to continue to listen to the people of Ontario, as we have demonstrated in the past and as we will in the future. I know I had the opportunity to speak to this just a few days ago, but I think it needs to be said again, because they quite frankly just don't remember over on that other side. Even though they're a little touchy today, I'm going to give it a go again.

520

What's the percentage of the previous government for time-allocated bills? Do you know that 60% of their bills were time-allocated? That is scandalous. How can they be in the House and have the audacity to say anything?

But you know what? They do, because they forget. It's been five years. They quite frankly don't remember. They never wanted to go out and talk to people. You can go back and look at the record. Presenter after presenter stated that. And now today we see them rise in the House to speak about the time allocation, which is appropriate, but we have to remember that 60% of their bills were time-allocated. I'll put our record up against that any time.

I know that the members from that side of the House are anxious to know what our record is. Our record is 25%. That is significantly lower, and it is respectful of what the people of Ontario want to see. They want to see us going out and having the conversation. I know from that side of the House the only conversation they're interested in is a conversation that happens every four years. When you talk about this in the House and remind them, they don't want to hear that, because I think that if they were given half a chance, they'd go back to the way they were.

I can remember at Queen's Park here the day that they took the budget, the Magna budget. They got on the buses and they rode the buses out to Magna; there was a "For sale" sign right out here on the lawn. Quite frankly, you can pick up a paper and see where it's happening now at another level of government as well, but that's for another day.

Mr. Speaker, I really do thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to the bill today, and I really did want to strongly reinforce that we know that in order to bring the strongest budget forward, we must have a conversation with the people of Ontario.

I also do want to thank the Minister of Finance. A number of my stakeholders, a number of my constituents have told me that they have had meetings with the Minister of Finance today. They appreciate the time that he has given for their voices to be heard, and they know that their concerns are going to be reflected in the budget.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm very pleased to be able to enter into this debate. I would just like to begin by looking at the actual motion that we are looking at. I think people need to understand that the practice of pre-budget consultation has always been through January and part of February. People need to understand that the reason for this was simply to offer the members of the committee the opportunity to travel throughout the province to hear deputations and then be able to look at these deputations in a thoughtful way, to be able to write a report and then to be able to present it to the Minister of Finance.

The reason for that was not only the importance of consultation, but also the importance of moving around the province. It was designed to fit with the creation of the budget in March and April of the year. So it is with great regret that we see that this motion before us tries to—or in fact does—hide this pre-budget consultation in the shadows of the holiday preparation. That's one of the

aspects of this motion that we object to. The reason for that is simply because of the limited opportunity it provides people in responding, because all of the major stakeholders are used to this process happening a month later, throughout January. They are also used to the fact that it travels extensively. We are faced, then, with a situation where, as I say, hiding in the shadows of the holiday you have a very brief time and very few cities in which to have this consultation.

I think it's particularly concerning to not only the members of the opposition here but also the public in general, because they have witnessed, as we have seen with the WSIB bill, the fact that everything of a substantive nature, such as WSIB, has been shrunk into a very short time period of debate. We had time allocation for that. We had very limited public hearings on the WSIB bill. Now we're looking at the same kind of shrinkage, if you like, in this process as well.

It's particularly upsetting because of the fact that, for two years, we have identified the job losses that have sprung out, in the manufacturing sector particularly, and these have come to both large cities and small cities. I am reminded of the very long list of those small Ontario cities that have had to absorb significant job losses. It would seem to me that those are the people that we should be engaging in conversation when we're talking about a provincial budget.

It's also, I think, the fact that people are reeling from the speed of change. It was this government that had had a bill come in June that allowed it to disperse public funds, because it declared that it had surplus. It changed the act that originally allowed the surplus to be used to pay down the debt so it could be used in whatever way that the government sees fit.

Even in August, at the AMO convention, the Premier was still announcing monies available for disbursement. In the context of that kind of change and the job losses that we're looking at in this province, it underscores just that much more why greater consultation should be taking place.

I was particularly struck this morning by the report in today's *Toronto Star* which recorded the remarks of the Premier in response to his own Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress. I would think, of all years, this is the one where you would want to hang on every word in a report such as that. I know that in this House, on several occasions, I have referred to their earlier work on various issues, whether it's poverty or the competitiveness of the province, so I was shocked at the fact that the Premier would disregard this report. He then went on to talk about the fact that "there's no shortage of advice"—and this is a quote of the Premier's—"that we're going to receive."

I would say that he's shutting that down. He's making sure that, in the short days of December, he's not going to give himself an opportunity to hear too much. But his quote further on, I think, is even more disconcerting. He says, "If we were to dramatically reduce corporate taxes we would reduce our revenues and that would create even more financial challenges for us."

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Well, there are two questions that I would like to ask him. The first one is: When all those layoffs were happening in the last 18 months, you didn't seem very concerned about the drop in revenues that you would have with 200,000-plus-and-counting people out of work.

One of the things, obviously, if you look at your own government planning and income streams, is the fact that people pay personal income tax. When they're unemployed, not only do they not do that, but they then start dipping into programs and services that the province has available. I think the Premier should have been more concerned about his revenues over the last 18 months than suddenly coming to this notion that he's concerned about it if we were to reduce corporate taxes. We all know that the most important thing you can do in stimulating the economy is to free up money so people have more in their jeans pockets.

The other part of this that amazes me, in terms of his concern over dramatically reducing corporate taxes, is of course that the companies have to make a profit in order to pay anything in corporate tax. I think he needs to revisit this comment, because I'm quite sure that the revenue is going to decrease, just by the fact that there aren't going to be the profits that have been made in the past few years. The task force on competitiveness has offered this for a number of years as a method of making sure there is more money in the jeans of more people. I think it's very unfortunate, at this particular point in time, when we're looking at very, very serious economic challenges, that the Premier is dismissing this opportunity and this advice and he is reducing the opportunity for advice from the general public.

I have two items that I think are particularly germane to this discussion today. One is that this afternoon, Magna announced that it would be laying off 850 workers at the Magna International plants in Aurora and Newmarket. It just adds to the concern and the instability for our communities across the province—I would argue, another good reason to go out and have further consultation.

I also received this afternoon a letter from a constituent of mine, Karen McElrea of Pefferlaw. She writes to me, "I am sending you this e-mail today to voice my concern about the automotive industry and their importance" in "the community and country in which I live...."

"The effects of that many Canadian workers to suddenly become unemployed would be catastrophic to the well-being of many families, communities and would certainly force this country into an economic depression with very little optimism of a quick recovery." She goes on to talk about how paramount it is to the future of our families, our children and our economic growth.

When I can bring to this discussion these examples of concerns, real-life concerns of real people in our communities, it suggests to me that they are making a plea for broader consultation. They are looking for leadership from this government and they need to have their voices heard.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm just going to take a few minutes. I have no desire, really, to prolong this debate. You heard from our finance critic, Michael Prue, the member from Beaches—East York. He sat on the committee and he understands the dealings of the subcommittee and what was discussed and what was decided, and I have no contention with that.

I do have a contention, as we all do in the New Democratic Party, with the idea of a time allocation motion. Certainly, time allocation is a very nice way, a very polite way, of saying "closure," that is to say, shutting down debate. We would never support such a motion.

This place should always be a place of open debate, of democracy, of hearing everyone's opinion, and I understand, although I disagree with my colleagues to the right of me, that that's partly the impetus behind their own notion. It's that they would like to see more and greater and more in-depth debate. I don't happen to agree that 19 meetings are needed. At a time of fiscal restraint, ferrying all the MPPs necessary around the province—well-fed, well-watered MPPs at that—to various places to hear people is probably not the best signal to be sending to the constituents in any of our ridings and is, certainly, I don't think, necessary. I would wonder at it, from the Progressive Conservatives who usually promulgate messages of fiscal restraint. So there is that.

There is a classic case where the government's select committee is meeting to discuss something near and dear to my heart, which is the payday lending bill that I brought in, and then they brought in one as well, which doesn't have a great deal of meat to it but a great deal of promise in terms of regulations. Right now, behind closed doors somewhere, there is some secret committee discussing said regulations. One of the most expert witnesses, in fact, in Canada wasn't able to go and deputize to that committee or be part of it because they wouldn't pay his fare from Ottawa to Toronto. This seems very problematic to me. We're willing to pay for MPPs to travel all around the province, but when it comes to having someone who was the head of the payday lending association and now has seen the light and is working in a critical position of that payday lending association as someone who is a proponent of credit unions—the fact that he can't deputize is sad indeed.

Having said that, I look forward, of course, to the results of that committee and hopefully to regulations which I've been promised will be stronger than Manitoba's. We live in hope, we do, in the New Democratic Party.

I can't support the Conservative motion to extend these hearings all over the province. I understand mainly different organizations are deputing. That seems to be adequate. What doesn't bode to be adequate is the response that we know will come in terms of the budget. We live in hope in the New Democratic Party, but we're not that hopeful that the serious measures needed, the serious plan needed, is going to come forth from our colleagues across the aisle.

What would we like to see, of course, in the budget? First and foremost, we would like to see more affordable housing, something that we do not have in this province, with 125,000 families waiting on the list—we don't have it.

What else would we like to see? Something that wouldn't cost a tax dime, and that's the passing of the bill for a \$10.25 minimum wage, and in fact a living wage bill. We would also like to see equal pay for equal work for temporary, part-time and contract workers, something I called for this morning. Again, it wouldn't cost the government a dime, not one tax dime, but is absolutely necessary. Well, I amend that. It might cost something for some OPSEU members who work for the government where the government is one of the worst offenders, actually, of hiring contract workers or temporary workers through agencies. It would cost that but, in fact, it's simply a question of equal pay for equal work. We would like to see that.

What else would we like to see in the budget? Well, we'd certainly like to see, on this day that we were hoping something would come forward—I understand it's happening tomorrow—some statement from the government about the elimination of violence against women day, which is honoured internationally. We would like to see more transition housing for women escaping abuse.

We would like to see more adult bodies in our school system, more social workers so the kind of horrendous instance of the death of little Katelynn Sampson needn't happen again, and one of the ways to prevent that is by having enough adult eyes on situations. Her school, for example, phoned her house and was told that she had gone to the reservation, and they didn't have a social worker who could travel up to the reservation to check if that was true or not. That has to end.

1640

We need more money for daycare. We have a province right next door to us that has \$7-a-day daycare and we don't. Why is that? Quebec has it; we don't. We need mandatory women's studies in the schools. Again it's a paltry sum, but more money for education. We need to fix the funding formula. Miss G Project has asked over and over for that. There are so many things that we in the New Democratic Party would like to see—certainly a raise in ODSP rates. The member from Beaches—East York, our poverty critic, has spoken about this over and over again. We don't see that. This would help with the poverty, putting more money into people's pockets that they could then spend to stimulate the economy.

We need infrastructure dollars. We need an uploading policy that's going to happen certainly a little faster than 18 years from now, or 2018—whenever, sometime, never. I joked with a friend that what we don't have is a 25 in 5 policy around poverty; what we have is a 5 in 25-year policy, where this government is going to take 25 years to affect the poverty rate by 5% at the rate they're going, if they get there at all. We need action on poverty and we need it soon—and dramatic action, not the piecemeal efforts we fear are coming.

Really, what do we expect from this government? A great deal from the budget. We hope they hear that and assume that they will from the number of submissions made to them before the Christmas season. I can't support the idea of an endless junket, as I said, of well-fed and well-watered MPPs running around the province—no. What we would like to see is action, certainly not action in the way of a closure motion, though; certainly not action in terms of the end of debate, but action in terms of doing something about the incredibly pressing problems that this province faces. That's what we'd like to see action on, and with that, I will sit down.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate today. Certainly, from some of the previous comments, I think it's a good time to remember some of the actions that have been taken in this House in response to economic crises or in response to some of the decisions that have had to be made. While it's nice to have the luxury of saying, "Well, I kind of support it, but I'm not going to support it," or "When it's time to stand up for this action, I'm not going to put my hand up or I'm not going to be in the House," or whatever may happen over there, when you look at the opportunities that the third party has had to play a positive role in this House and you look at some of the things they've voted against, it's a sorry track record, in my opinion. When you look at such things as the Investing in Ontario Act, raising the minimum wage, the auto investment strategy, the advanced manufacturing fund, the third party in fact has voted against a lot of the opportunities that have come along. From the comments that we've just heard, you might have thought they supported some of those initiatives that have simply made Ontario a better place. While every piece of legislation may not have everything you want in it, I think as a responsible party you need to vote in favour of moving the province ahead, and that's what today's decision is all about.

When you see some of the negative news coming from our neighbours to the south these days and some of the financial forecasts, you realize that our province, as dependant as it is upon our exports to our neighbour, has to make some pretty big decisions. I think at a time like this the constituents, the citizens, of our province look to their governments—to their provincial government, to their federal government, to their local government—to work together. The Minister of Finance has come forward and said, "Do you know what? Based on what's happening out there, based on the unusual, unique circumstances, it would make some sense to me that we get out early and we talk to the public, we engage the public in the province of Ontario and ask them for their advice, ask them for their input, ask them what they would like to see their government do in these troubled economic times."

I think that as a government, as an opposition party and as a third party in this House, at some point in the very near future we're going to be asked to vote on some

issues that are going to strike a balance that will allow us to move forward as a province, that would allow us to maintain and protect the public services that give us the lifestyle we enjoy in this province and at the same time deal with some of the troubled economic times that are facing the North American continent, the European continent and indeed the entire world.

I think it's time to move on. At some point you've got to start to set a plan in place and you've got to say, "This is how we plan to proceed. This is how we plan to engage the public. This is the process that we will use." If we look back at the track record of our government, when we took over government in 2003 we had that shock that, I think, reverberated right around the province to all those who had been involved in politics; I think that even includes the media. That is, we found that we had inherited a \$5.6-billion deficit that was hidden from the public. In fact, we had to, as a result of the conduct of the previous government, bring in a law that would guarantee that no government could ever again hide a deficit. It's a shame we had to do that, but it was the only way of dealing with it and we had to make sure that the Auditor General signed off on the books before an election. That's how the term of government started off in 2003.

Since that time, we brought in a plan for change. We brought in the Investing in People, Strengthening our Economy budget. We committed \$6.2 billion to the Reaching Higher plan because we understood the importance of post-secondary education. That was the largest multi-year investment that the post-secondary education system has seen in this province in over 40 years. As we speak today, one in four students is now a recipient of some sort of funding assistance from the provincial government.

When 2006 came along, we were able to balance the budget. In 2007 we brought in the Ontario child benefit. That's helping more than a million children. Now we've seen increases in the hourly minimum wage—it's going to \$10.25 by 2010—and this year municipalities, the people that we work with, our partners who help run our towns, cities, villages and regions, were the recipients of \$1 billion in new municipal infrastructure, something that this province has needed for a long, long time and something that I think is going to prove a wise investment for people to come.

Every year, we have a process in this House, and that's that the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs goes out and engages in a conversation based on the rules decided by that committee. The committee has come forward and said, "Instead of this process taking place as it normally does, in late January, because of the unusual circumstances we believe that members of the standing committee should be out there right now to start to restore some of the confidence that people need in their economy and their government; that things are in good shape, that they can start to spend in the way that they have in the past, make investments again, buy the new appliances and buy the cars."

Auto, for example, is a huge industry in my riding. Oakville is the home of the head office of Ford Canada.

We've got some of the most productive plants in the entire world. The Canadian Auto Workers Local 707 are some of the most productive workers. Some of the most productive plants on the entire planet are right here in our jurisdiction and we need to sort out very, very quickly what the future is for that industry and how we're going to help it succeed. We're drawing a number of opinions from a number of people in that regard. It's time to formalize that process. It's time to get out.

When you look around the world, if you look at the United States there's a debate raging within that country as to how to proceed. When you look at some of the Great Lakes states, they're proceeding as well. The federal government is making decisions. It's starting to evolve a process that's going to allow them to make some of the decisions on behalf of their citizens. As Canadian citizens, we need to be out there as well. We need to get on top of this. We need to make sure that we're getting the fairness that Ontario deserves in its treatment from the federal government. What many people in this province don't realize, when we're talking about haves and have-not provinces, is that this province, a province in which we all live, contributes \$23 billion a year to the federal government. Much of that goes to other corners of this country, and it's a great country that we have. Ontario has never shirked away from that responsibility. But in troubled economic times when the person, state, province or jurisdiction that's providing the vast majority of the wealth of that country needs some assistance, some help, needs someone to share in the workload, that's the time for a responsible federal government to step up to the plate. Some of the comments we've heard in past, obviously from the current Minister of Finance, I think in retrospect even he would regret making. They weren't positive comments; they did nobody any good. It may have made him feel good for a few seconds; it did nothing for the future of our country.

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I'm hoping that, as a result of the decision being made today, we can begin to move forward on the five-point plan we propose for the future of this province. I believe we're going to come out of this much stronger than we went into it. I believe the people have what it takes to make Ontario a world leader, even with these troubled economic times. We can't get to that point until we get on the road and hear from those people. I urge all members of the House today to support having that committee on the road as early as possible and getting expert advice from people in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I guess the key thing is to remind the viewers, as well as members in the House, that the discussion this afternoon is a time allocation motion that's closing off debate on one of the most important topics facing not only us here but the people of Ontario. In fact, the very heart and soul of the economy of Ontario is at great risk, and it's tragic.

If you put this in perspective, what is actually happening here is that they're limiting dialogue with the

people of Ontario. That's it in a nutshell. I could stand here for an hour and outline case and story that reinforce the humanity of this whole issue.

I understand that government motion 14 is time allocation. For the viewer, we've been given 40 minutes to address our concerns. Now, how does that apply to me, as the member for Durham, and to other members here who have spoken?

Let's make this a real story about families. I have two stories I want to tell that are real. One is from a General Motors dealership in my home community of Bowmanville. A person there called me; I won't use the name. This is a genuine story that can be checked out. They have a child who is disabled, and he works there as a salesperson—a very nice person; I've met him in the community over many years. The dealership is his heart and soul; it's his income. That's right where these products, the manufacturing and the economy are in trouble, and he's asking me what our Premier, Dalton McGuinty, is going to do. I said, "Well, I have written to him, I've written to the Minister of Economic Development, I've written to Jim Flaherty and I've written to the Prime Minister, in fact, and expressed support for my constituents."

That's one, and like we all know, I'm sure all people are hearing from dealers in their communities. They all employ five, six, 10 or 15 people in the showroom and probably three or four times that in the service area of the business. Those are families. This is Christmas. We need to be there to listen to them. That's our job.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm not lecturing people. I'm saying I've been privileged to serve them.

One of the e-mails I received—there are hundreds of e-mails that I've received. Again I won't mention the name, but this is a person I spoke to on the phone after I got the e-mail. I can produce it if somebody wants to challenge it. She's a single parent, 58 years old, and she works in the engineering centre at General Motors in Oshawa. As far as she understands from her direct supervisor, if there isn't immediate aid in some form to secure jobs, some provision, it will be a very dark holiday season. It would also, in a more sophisticated way, almost ruin her pension opportunities.

These are genuine stories of genuine people that could be told across the province of Ontario. I think there's a psychological release for people when they get to tell their stories. It is our duty to listen. What you've done here is ignore the advice—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order.

Mr. John O'Toole: I've been in this function for about 10 years. I was on the committee that the member, Wayne Arthurs from Pickering-Scarborough East, is on and had the privilege of sitting in on these hearings, which we've had for years, Mr. Speaker, and you've been here longer than I have. Some would say too long, but that's another discussion—I'm only kidding. These meetings were always held—and the members would

know—generally, in January and February. That's what was done. The pre-budget hearings from that committee met. They actually got to know each other and the communities around Ontario. They got to hear the families, the small businesses, the concerns of the chambers of commerce, the boards of trade, the leadership in the communities, the municipally elected, the nurses, the teachers—from the various people who provide these many services. And you're denying that, and that's what this debate this afternoon is about. Shame on you.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Shame on you.

Mr. John O'Toole: Merry Christmas.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: And I think it's terrible—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order, order.

Mr. John O'Toole: —that we wouldn't, in these exceptionally economically difficult times, have visited. As our member from Niagara West—Glanbrook has said—he listed several communities. In fact, I'd like to name some of them. Many of you here today—some of you have left early, I guess, because there aren't many here listening, and that's disappointing too. Cambridge—the member from Cambridge is right here. He's here to speak, and he has been cut off because of this time allocation. He has about 50 different businesses that are in perilous condition.

Chatham—Speaker, it's either you or Mr. Hoy who represents this—many automotive-related and manufacturing industries.

When I look around here: Cornwall—the member down here; Hamilton—well, we had people from Hamilton here earlier; Andrea—she's running for the leadership for the NDP and I should get that in here. There's Kitchener—Waterloo—Elizabeth Witmer; Ted Arnott's riding; Lindsay—Laurie Scott, and she spoke here today; Oxford county—the member from Oxford spoke.

These people are just adding their voice on behalf of their constituents. That's our job. That's the reality of this debate. Let's not trivialize what this time allocation is. We've been shut out, shut down and ignored. That's what you're saying to the people of Ontario. Shame on you because—

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Shame on you.

Mr. John O'Toole: —don't you recognize that these are—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Huron—Bruce.

Mr. John O'Toole: —very unusual and frightening economic times? And what they've done is, they've—the Premier, I think, is part of this. I'm going to tell the whole story. Here's what I believe is happening, because I spoke to the person engineering—and I said to them—this is quite honestly what I said: "I am suspicious that there are three bills before the House that are sensitive and sentimental bills." Bill 133, for protecting children and vulnerable women, that's important and we support that. There's my bill, Bill 10, the Lori Dupont Act—and the Attorney General. But it's not about the economy,

okay? It's emotional, it takes the spotlight off. The first three pages in the clippings today are about these issues that we generally support. The other two are about Highway Traffic Act amendments, Bill 118, I think it is, and Bill 126. They've got all the young people outraged. You know that. We're all getting e-mails from these young people. Their graduated licence is being extended for three years and they're being discriminated against.

We're talking about Highway Traffic Act amendments when we should be spending time on the most important things, which are the economy of this province of Ontario, working in partnership with Stephen Harper, working in partnership with Jim Flaherty, working in partnership with, dare I say it, David Miller, working in partnership with our municipal leaders and the union leaders.

But no, what are they doing? They're cutting it off. You're refusing to listen and respect the views of those who don't have the privilege of being here. They don't want to listen.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a sad day when democracy is treated this disdainfully in this place, the sanctuary of debate. It's being shut down.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: I am heartbroken, quite frankly, by the arrogance of the government. It saddens me, the arrogance of it.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order, order.

Mr. John O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I am so moved that I am going to have to give up the rest of my time. I know they won't listen.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I think it's so important that we want to get the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs out on the road as quickly as possible. I know some have said, "Let's do it in January and February," but we know that with the economic challenges that we face, we've got to get that committee out there early.

1700

They'll be visiting five communities across Ontario. The communities are being selected and will cover all the geographic regions in Ontario. They will get the opportunity to get the input that they need to formulate a report from that committee, that we all look forward to seeing early in the new year to help us formulate the budget that we'll present in March of this year. They'll be able to hear from every sector of the economy. All sectors of the communities will be able to come forward and provide that input.

Just this afternoon, I got a call from David McGee. His family owns Jack McGee Chevrolet Cadillac in Peterborough. It started in 1963. It's one of the largest General Motors dealerships in east-central Ontario. Mr. McGee said we have to get together with the federal government—the federal minister, Mr. Clement, and our

minister, Minister Bryant—to get that package together to assist the automotive sector. It's not just the production side of it; indeed, it's the dealership side of it, it's the parts side of it, that are very, very important to our communities right across Ontario.

So I'm hearing what they said. I certainly said that the finance committee will be getting out early. I know it's a hardship for some people to set aside those Christmas plans, but we're seized with the challenges that we're facing, so we want to get that committee out early.

We hear from the opposition—and that's really interesting, because I remember that follow-up just before the 2003 provincial election. They had the Magna budget that was taken out of this precinct. I know the member from Eglinton–Lawrence was so articulate on a number of occasions talking about how Parliament was held in contempt at that particular time, with moving that budget outside of this precinct to Magna. I believe it was the only time in Ontario political history that the Speaker of the day—Gary Carr, that very independent-minded, very articulate man—wrote a very long dissertation on how the government of the day was holding Parliament in contempt by taking the budget to that big gymnasium with only invited guests. Indeed, that was a very unfortunate thing when it came to the respect of parliamentary tradition.

I just got a note here from research, and this is an interesting one. It says the NDP government changed the standing orders in 1992, making it easier to time-allocate bills. The government was able to put forward a debatable motion unilaterally imposing limits on the length of debates on government bills and motions. These reforms marked, for the first time, that time allocation was codified in the standing orders. Previously, time allocation motions were presented as a substantive government motion that required debate. I know why they wanted to bring that in. It's because when they designed the social contract—that was a real gem. I know that was cooked up in the backrooms. The member from Kenora–Rainy River, who was the number-two man in that government, next to the Premier, Mr. Rae—they got together in the backroom, cooked up the social contract and then brought it in. They knew that they didn't want one minute of debate on the social contract, so they changed the rules of the House so that they were able to jam through that very remarkable piece of legislation. When I talk to OPSEU members in Peterborough and the various unions in Peterborough, they still have the scars on their backs from that social contract legislation. How did they bring that in? They closed down Parliament, through a new ensure motion, to bring that in. In fact, things were going so badly that Parliament didn't even meet in 1995, because they didn't want to be accountable to the government.

We look over the things that we've been doing over the last number of years—in 2004, our very first budget as the Plan for Change. We brought back fiscal sanity to the province of Ontario. We had that famous \$5.3-billion deficit that no one knew about. Indeed, Madam

Ecker, a very fine person, went through that whole campaign period in Durham region having her press conferences daily and reassured the people of Ontario that indeed the budget was balanced. Lo and behold, we come into power in October 2003 and had the former Auditor General, Eric Peters, do a study of what happened with that budget, and we had a \$5.6-billion deficit.

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Leal: We had to take decisive action and decisive leadership to get rid of that structural deficit, which was so very important. Someone over there said that Gerry Phillips and Monte Kwinter did raise some questions. But at the finance committee of the day, Madam Ecker said, “No, Mr. Phillips, you're wrong. No, Mr. Kwinter, you're wrong. Believe me. This budget is balanced.” They took that song and dance all through that campaign in 2003.

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Well, that's true, too. The member from Eglinton–Lawrence says, “Canada won't have a deficit.” We know that when Jim Flaherty comes in tomorrow, he'll talk about the mother of all deficits over the next few years.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: I believe that, under standing order 47, the speaker should speak to the topic. I believe the topic we're debating here is the government's reason for cutting off debate on this very important motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I remind the member from Oxford that it's actually standing order 23, but it is a good point of order. Member for Peterborough, I'm listening very carefully.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I know there's a big audience in Peterborough who are listening this afternoon, and of course we know that the good folks of Peterborough are very interested in history—they're interested in the political history in Ontario. I just wanted to spend a couple of moments to remind them of that very indistinguished history of eight years.

Indeed I want to welcome the leadership candidates for—

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Oxford, wait until I recognize you, and then you can start to talk. The member for Oxford.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Now that I know the order, 23, I do believe that the member is to speak to why this—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Oxford, take your seat. I'm listening very carefully. The member for Peterborough.

Mr. Jeff Leal: You know, it's interesting: Some of them over there, of course, believe in the old kind of Stalinist revision-of-history technique. We just want to remind the people there what the real history is. I know they want to deny their eight years in government, and that's okay. We're moving forward.

I just want to highlight a couple more budget things. Our last budget, 2008, Growing a Stronger Ontario, is

very important: \$1.5 billion for the three-year Skills to Action plan. That's why we want our finance committee to get out on the road. We want to talk to hear from those deputants who will talk about some of these programs that are producing results in communities.

In the community of Peterborough I talked to the site manager of GE just yesterday night at an event, the Festival of Trees, which raises money for the hospital and the health sector in Peterborough. He was telling me that their order book is full for 2009, and they're looking forward to extending their various contracts into 2010. They certainly show a great deal of enthusiasm, in their particular sector, for where the economy is going. Just recently, we provided almost \$5 million to Kawartha Ethanol Inc. to develop an ethanol plant in Peterborough—again, good news. There's lots of very positive activity. I know that the Minister for Research and Innovation has a chance to visit our community on numerous occasions to see what's going on at Trent University, Fleming College and Flying Colours, all good-news stories that are out there, and it just keeps rolling.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I'm delighted to enter the debate. Our good friend the Minister of Finance has a very difficult task ahead of him. In unprecedented global economic turmoil, he has to fashion a budget for this province this spring. We have a number of mechanisms we have used in the past. The minister himself goes out on consultations, and he has started to do that quite a bit earlier. The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, of which I was a proud member for a number of years in the previous Legislature, has a fine history of going out across this province and listening to people, so that that advice can be crystallized and given to the Minister of Finance as he works on this very, very daunting task that he has in front of him.

The question here today is, should we get on top of this now or should we wait? This is no time, I say to my friends opposite, for dithering. The good people of Ontario are not expecting their elected officials to come up with any excuse as to the inconvenience to them to do the

job to which they have been elected and to serve on the committees that they have been appointed to by this House, by their political parties.

So, if the Minister of Finance is saying to this House, in these tumultuous times, that he needs advice from SCFEA, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, sooner rather than later—I can say as a minister of the crown that I have been requested to put my budget allocation for next year in much sooner than later—if he is asking us and the members to do that, I think it is important for us not to dither, not to wait, but to move on this motion. Let's get the committee on the road on the week of December 15 because the times call for this action.

I'm sure now that the members—I hope—will support this motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? Does any other member wish to speak?

Ms. Smith has moved government notice of motion number 92. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Now that we have everything in order, I have been handed in its official form a deferral notice that pursuant to standing order 28(h), the vote on the time allocation motion will be deferred until deferred votes on Thursday, November 27.

Vote deferred.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Orders of the day.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House is adjourned until 9 of the clock on Thursday, November 27.

The House adjourned at 1713.

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Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
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Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
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Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West—Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest—Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges—Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton—Springdale	
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Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean—Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga—Brampton South / Mississauga—Brampton-Sud	
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Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
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Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming-Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland-Quinte West	
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Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
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Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton-Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto-Danforth	
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Howard Hampton, Greg Sorbara
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DEFERRED VOTES / VOTES DIFFÉRÉS

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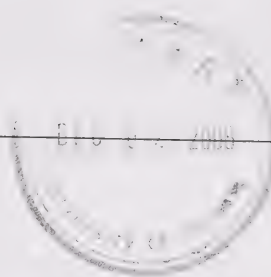
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First Session, 39th Parliament

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**Journal
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Thursday 27 November 2008

Jeudi 27 novembre 2008

**Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters**

**Président
L'honorable Steve Peters**

**Clerk
Deborah Deller**

**Greffière
Deborah Deller**

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 27 November 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 27 novembre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by an aboriginal prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

COUNTERING DISTRACTED DRIVING AND PROMOTING GREEN TRANSPORTATION ACT, 2008 LOI DE 2008 VISANT À COMBATTRE LA CONDUITE INATTENTIVE ET À PROMOUVOIR LES TRANSPORTS ÉCOLOGIQUES

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 25, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 118, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of devices with display screens and hand-held communication and entertainment devices and to amend the Public Vehicles Act with respect to car pool vehicles / Projet de loi 118, Loi modifiant le Code de la route afin d'interdire l'usage d'appareils à écran et d'appareils portatifs de télécommunications et de divertissement et modifiant la Loi sur les véhicules de transport en commun à l'égard des véhicules de covoiturage.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to participate in this debate.

Applause.

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to thank the member for Brant for his applause. He is probably expecting some reciprocal gesture, and I'm sure at the appropriate time he'll receive that.

As the critic for transportation for the official opposition, I'm pleased to make my contribution, but at the outset I want to thank my colleagues who have spoken to this bill already. As a result of their very exhaustive work in terms of bringing issues to the attention of the government, I will say at the outset that I will not repeat all of those points that have been made so very effectively.

I will be sharing my time, Speaker, with my colleague from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. He will also bring his perspective to the debate.

At the outset let me say that of course, in principle, we are supportive of this bill. I want to give credit to my colleague Mr. O'Toole, who has brought successive private member's legislation before the House. In this bill,

Bill 118, the government has essentially incorporated Mr. O'Toole's bill. It's through the work of legislators like Mr. O'Toole, who have persistently, over time, brought this issue to the attention not only of this House, but by virtue of tabling the bill and the debate taking place, that there has been an increase in awareness on the part of the public of the importance of this issue.

I can tell you that I have had a significant volume of correspondence—e-mails and telephone calls—on this bill. Not all of those submissions have been supportive. So what I have said to my constituents and to stakeholders is that we will call on the government to ensure that there is an opportunity for public input, that those individuals who either have concerns with details regarding the legislation or are looking for certain assurances with regard to regulations and how they're structured—that there will be ample opportunity for that kind of input.

We are in second reading debate. It's debate in principle, basically, so when the vote for second reading takes place on this legislation, members of this House are essentially saying, "In principle, we agree with the direction of this legislation." That is not to say that a vote in favour is saying that all aspects of this bill are acceptable to this House or to members of the Legislature. Hopefully, we will have an opportunity, assuming that the government agrees, to have public hearings, at which point in time we will be able to take into consideration those specific recommendations.

I have some of my own that I would like to put forward, and will put forward during those public hearings, to get input from the public in terms of how they feel, as well as stakeholders. I have some questions, for example, for police services in the province. I have some questions as well for various stakeholders, particularly in the commercial trucking industry.

I have one concern that was brought to my attention by a former Minister of Transportation, the former Honourable David Turnbull. He is currently the president and CEO of the Canadian Courier and Logistics Association. He raised a very specific concern with me during a conversation I had with him recently. At the very outset, what I'd like to do—for the benefit of the government, they can be thinking about this issue, an area that we would like to see addressed in regulation—is read into the record some of the concerns that Mr. Turnbull brought to my attention. I will quote from Mr. Turnbull's submission:

"The Canadian Courier and Logistics Association is in support of the proposed aims of the legislation to im-

prove safety on Ontario roads. It is essential, however, that exemptions for certain hand-held wireless communications devices used for logistical purposes to dispatch, track and monitor commercial drivers be incorporated into supporting regulations.

"The courier and messenger industry depends on communications with personnel operating delivery vehicles. Safety concerns are always paramount and the industry has a good safety record as drivers are professionals who are used to operating in varying driving conditions.

"The industry consists of two main components, 'same day' or local messenger service and 'next day' or later delivery. Both segments use hand-held devices of various types.

"'Same day' messengers are dispatched throughout the day and provide a direct point A to point B service. Monitoring the location of a messenger at all times is essential to determine who is the nearest to a requested pickup. This segment utilizes a mix of voice and GPS-enabled communications equipment. Many use hand-held two-way radios which are attached to the vehicle, while some utilize devices such as the units marketed under the brand name 'Mike.' Most require only a one-button press to respond to dispatch calls. As much as possible, dispatch is done while parked. In fact, most is completed at the point of pickup and delivery while stationary. However, the ability to locate and/or dispatch on the move is essential to the routing procedures both from a competitive and environmental point of view. Response time is of the essence to customers. Environmental responsibility dictates that an already dispatched messenger close to another requested pickup be contacted on the move, eliminating the need for two vehicles.

"From time to time, a direction to a difficult to locate address is requested from dispatch or customer while unable to stop due to parking restrictions.

"'Next day' delivery companies, which are mostly represented by the large national and global companies, typically operate on predetermined routes for deliveries but receive requests for non-scheduled pickups. Many of these companies utilize hand-held tablets that dispatch in text form. Employees are instructed not to respond while moving, but are permitted to respond at traffic lights. This ensures that second vehicles are not required to be dispatched."

0910

I wanted to read that particular submission into the record, because I think it's important that the government understands there are various specific commercial applications of some of these hand-held devices that should be considered when the regulations are set, and the minister does have the right to prescribe those regulations. I think, as well, the point that Mr. Turnbull makes is that, in the case of commercial vehicles, these are professional drivers, these are people who are trained, not only in terms of how to deal with traffic situations, but also how to safely utilize this equipment. So I would be in support of the regulations providing an exemption, as has been requested by Mr. Turnbull.

I want to turn my attention to another issue relating to these hand-held devices. I have had considerable input from constituents relating, for example, to GPS units. I know that the government has already indicated through the minister, as well as the parliamentary assistant, that GPS units and similar units that are mounted on the dash would be exempted from this legislation. What I think we need to clarify, and I'm sure that we'll deal with this in the course of committee hearings, but there are GPS units that can be rented. For example, when someone rents a vehicle and they're uncertain about how to navigate—particularly in this city, but it applies throughout the province—it's really much safer to have a proper GPS unit, rather than be wondering where you turn next. It's an effective piece of equipment, but these are portable units. Having said that they're portable units, there is the ability to mount them on a dash. These are the kinds of details that I've undertaken to bring forward to the minister and to the government, and I would expect that when it comes to structuring the regulations, we would take into consideration those very practical aspects of devices such as the GPS.

One of the other areas that I want to focus on this morning is whether or not this government, in bringing in this legislation, has fully considered the consequences and the penalties that are going to be prescribed here. I've heard from the minister that what is not intended—withstanding that there are some substantial monetary fines; you know, they can range from \$50 to \$500 for a conviction—what is missing here, in my opinion, and there may be some differences of opinion even within our own caucus on this, and I would invite submissions from stakeholders when this bill comes to the public hearing stage, what is lacking, are demerit points assessed on convictions. If this government passes this legislation without the penalty of demerit points in addition to the fines, then I would submit that many will consider those fines simply a cost of doing business. Another \$50, if you happen to get caught, is not a big issue for many people.

I believe that if the government is serious about wanting to change behaviour on the part of drivers in this province through this legislation, then there should also be the consequence of demerit points, because that is where drivers will in fact begin to give a second thought to using a hand-held device that will result in driver distraction. If there is no demerit point assessment in this legislation, Ontario will be the only jurisdiction, not only in Canada but in the United States and in other parts of the world, that does not have a demerit point consequence to a conviction. I would suggest that if in fact that's the case, then what we have here yet one more time on the part of this government is an ability to present the perception that they're serious about changing behaviour of drivers with regard to distraction, but not really willing to go the distance in terms of putting the substantive provisions into legislation that would actually make a difference at the end of the day.

I want to just very briefly refer as well to comments made by the Minister of Transportation during his second

reading debate. I find one aspect of this very interesting. I support the provision that would change the Public Vehicles Act to make it easier for people to carpool. I think, as the minister stated in his remarks, that that's a positive step. In fact, my colleague Gilles Bisson had brought this to the attention of the government through, I believe, a private member's bill. He's been lobbying for that for some time. I think it's appropriate for all the right reasons.

I want to read into the record what the minister stated during his debate, and then I want to just quickly comment on a concern that I have that relates to a more recent piece of legislation that the minister introduced from the same seat from which he made these comments:

"There's another significant matter in this particular bill, and that is environmentally friendly transportation solutions. It was recently brought to my attention that the current definition of carpooling, under the Public Vehicles Act, has made it difficult for individuals in certain situations to form carpools to go to and from school, social events and even work. That is why we've proposed an amendment to the Public Vehicles Act to make it easier for people to carpool. We are removing the barriers and red tape associated with carpooling in Ontario, in hopes that this will further encourage their use and help remove single-occupant vehicles from Ontario's highways."

Here's the irony: In one piece of legislation, the minister brought forward an amendment that would encourage carpooling, but just last week he introduced legislation in this House that restricts carpooling for young people in the province. So he's experienced a considerable backlash, especially from young people right across this province, by the thousands, who were caught off guard, who are saying, "Minister of Transportation, why, simply because I may be 21 years of age or younger, are you now saying that I can't have more than one other person in the car with me when I'm driving?"

0920

What happens to the minister's encouragement in this legislation for carpooling so that, as he puts it, when people go to school carpooling in Ontario, "this will further encourage their use and help remove single-occupant vehicles" to and from school, to and from work? I believe that again, with regard to that legislation—I support it here; I think it's the right thing to do for all the reasons the government has announced for this change being brought forward. But I would also ask that the minister be consistent, first of all, in his own thinking with regard to the issue of carpooling, and that he understand that the provision he is proposing for young drivers that restricts the number of young people in a car is wrong-headed.

I want to put the minister on notice now that I will not support the provision of the young drivers' legislation he is proposing that would restrict young drivers from having more than one passenger 21 years of age or younger in the car.

I believe we need to have extensive public hearings on that legislation. In fact, my call to the minister would have been that we have those public consultations even

before we get to second reading of that bill, so that the minister and the Premier can have direct input from stakeholders—from people across the province and especially from young people—on the practicalities of that legislation, which I believe the ministry has missed in drafting that legislation.

I want to be very clear that I support the intent of that legislation. I personally am strongly in favour of the zero tolerance level for alcohol in that legislation. But I will also put the minister on notice that it is my view that we would be much better to define novice drivers in a broader category and make it apply to novice drivers and inexperienced drivers, rather than identify the age of 21 as the target group to which that legislation should apply.

I think the issue here is not how old a person is; to victimize young people through that legislation is fundamentally wrong. I think the intent here is to deal with the issue that we have inexperienced drivers, and that inexperienced drivers should be required to adhere to a different and higher standard when it comes to blood-alcohol level.

Even before we get to the point of a broader debate on that, I would like to ask the minister, on the record, to start giving consideration to being willing to make amendments to that proposed legislation, which would remove the age restriction and replace it with, perhaps, a new definition of novice driver. I believe that will bring many more people and many more stakeholders on side to support that legislation.

With regard to the issue of speeding, no one in this House is a stronger advocate than I, as you will know, Speaker, in terms of wanting to improve road safety when it comes to speeding in our province. However, even with regard to that provision, I have serious concerns that to target young people and suggest that even with a first conviction there should be a licence suspension is not going to have the kind of public support and stakeholder support that that legislation would require.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: With the greatest respect to my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora, there are two bills before the Legislature that deal with the Ministry of Transportation, and he is talking about the wrong one. That one is not before the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I appreciate your point of order. I have listened very carefully to the honourable member from Newmarket–Aurora, and he has been tying the two bills together quite nicely, I think.

Mr. Frank Klees: Thank you, Speaker. If the member from Mississauga–South were, perhaps, paying more attention, he would understand—

Mr. Bob Delaney: Streetsville.

Mr. Frank Klees: Mississauga–Streetsville—he might understand how this is being tied together as well. I will try to give you some more assistance with that.

I was referring, as you know, to the Minister of Transportation, who is just joining us. I know that the reason he has come into the House now is because he understands how these two bills are tied together and he

wants to hear personally how effectively I have tied these bills together. The minister and I have had discussions, not only about this bill, which he knows I am very supportive of, but he would also know and he does know that I'm looking forward to public hearings and that much of the work has yet to be done through regulation. I look forward to working with him as do, I know, other members of this House as well as stakeholders.

Having tied the young drivers legislation into the bill before us, I want to return to Bill 118 before I defer to my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I want to say to the minister that I am supportive. I will look forward to the public hearings. I have stated a number of areas that I believe we need to perhaps have a second look at in terms of how the government approaches this. I've made the point about demerit points; we've had that discussion. I know that, no doubt, one of the concerns even from the police services is that if in fact this conviction carries demerit points, there will perhaps be more challenges in court, and the implication to our court system, then, would be that there may well be more gridlock than we have now in our court system.

But I submit to the minister that we shouldn't be compromising on the consequences of what I think we all agree is an important issue and an important road safety concern, namely that of distracted drivers. I believe that if we are serious about wanting to change the behaviour of Ontario drivers, then there should be a consequence there. If there is a problem with court gridlock, then the issue is that we have to resource our courts better. We have to ensure that the resources are there to deal with those convictions and appeals if they happen to come forward.

I will take this opportunity to thank the minister for bringing this legislation forward and again my colleague John O'Toole, who I believe blazed the trail on this, for his persistence. I remember when he first brought this legislation forward, there was very little support, even in this place. But over time, the evidence has become clear that it's the right thing to do. So to the government, I say congratulations for bringing this forward. Now we will wait to see how responsive the government will be when it comes to recommendations for amendments during public hearings and, of course, how responsive they will be to stakeholders, as I stated at the outset, when it comes to drafting regulations.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The Chair would like to recognize Mr. David Turnbull, who's with us in the galleries here today, the former member of provincial Parliament in the 35th, 36th and 37th Parliament as the member for York Mills and then as the member for Don Valley West.

Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I was not aware that Mr. Turnbull was in the gallery, and I was waxing eloquent quoting him. I should have actually asked him to do this himself. Welcome to Mr. Turnbull.

0930

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I am quite sure that if my friend from Newmarket–Aurora starts waxing eloquently about someone else in the future, they too will appear in the gallery. There's no question about it.

It's a pleasure to join the debate here on Bill 118. I'm going to pick up where my colleague left off, in congratulating, finally, John O'Toole for his persistence in raising this issue in the Legislature, bringing it forth in proposed legislation on more than one occasion over the last several years. The government didn't seem to have much interest in this bill throughout their first mandate. I do have to question why, now, they're bringing out this bill. You have to wonder out loud if it isn't because they're looking to change the channel on the issues facing us here today in this Legislature on a daily basis, and that is the question of Ontario's finances and the economy and this government's lack of a plan to deal with it. So switching channels, changing the phone number sort of thing is what they're doing here partially with this cellphone bill at this time.

Having said that, for the most part I don't know that there are too many, if any, members of the House who have indicated that they oppose this bill. But as my colleague Mr. Klees and a former minister did indicate, there are portions of this bill that we have concerns about. I'm going to get to them later.

I also want to raise the issue of the fact that we already have legislation in place to deal with distracted drivers. If that's not functioning properly, then this bill is not going to take its place, because those actions are still going to be out there. We still have to be a lot more diligent about how we're dealing with distracted drivers.

There are so many ways that drivers can be distracted. We see people every day putting on makeup, shaving—not likely the same people, but that's another matter—fumbling with coffee cups to open them while driving, eating a Big Mac or a bacon mushroom melt or something like that, that's dripping all over them, and then they're driving all over the road. There are so many different things that can distract a driver. A cellphone is one of them.

So we have to be very, very diligent about how we're dealing with distracted drivers in every possible way. I've seen people reading the newspaper while driving.

I do concur, however, that cellphones—there is no question about it—are distracting. I have fallen into that trap myself, where I have been unduly distracted because of the use of a cellphone. For the most part, I can tell you that when I get into my vehicle today—and I'm not going to say that I don't use the cellphone when I'm driving because that would be untrue—I do put on the hands-free immediately so that those distractions are limited. Even with the hands-free, it's not just about where your hands are; it's about where your head is, and communicating while driving is not really the right thing to be doing. We do it, but it is not the best course of action. The best course of action is, of course, to pull over, proceed with your call and then move on. In this world, it's not always possible.

That brings me to a couple of things that I want to talk about: some possible amendments. My colleague Mr. Klees raised the issue from the Canadian Courier and Logistics Association, of which Mr. Turnbull is the president and CEO, and about how important the ability to communicate on a timely basis is for people in that business. I won't read the letter again, because we want to limit the amount of time here, but those are things that we need to get discussing to ensure that business is able to operate. Certainly I think the record of safety within that business is a very good one. So we have to understand that we can't put in undue barriers to the operations of business.

Another group that we want to talk about is the two-way radio people. A constituent from my riding, Peter DeWolf, who is also a newspaper reporter with the *Arnprior Chronicle-Guide*, raised this issue with me. He has been a radio operator for many years and actually writes a column on the issue. He has some concerns with the broad language proposed in this new law, which could be read to include the use of two-way radios while on the road. He is proposing a simple, one-line amendment to the proposed law, which would read, in the exemptions, "Communication apparatus or persons licensed to operate under the Canada Radiocommunications Act are exempt."

I think that's a very good point. People who operate logging trucks and people who dispatch vehicles in different areas use two-way radios to communicate, and it is essential that they not lose that ability to communicate because of this law. When we get this bill to committee, I think we have to take a close look at some of those things and see whether some of the things this bill is doing are necessarily what we want to accomplish with it.

I would also like clarification on GPS units. Mr. Klees raised that, and I have to be honest with you that my understanding is different. My understanding is that a GPS communication device, other than a BlackBerry or something like that, which has GPS capabilities, was going to be exempt from this law. I would certainly want to voice my concern about that. As long as you're not inputting information while driving, a GPS unit is very helpful—it's helpful regardless. You are not creating a danger if you're not inputting information while you are driving. If you put in the address you need to get to, your destination, while you are parked, certainly the unit itself giving you that information is very, very helpful. We want to make sure that is clarified.

I do want to tie in the two bills again, as my colleague so eloquently did, because we never know if we'll have the opportunity. The minister seems to be trapped by some inconsistency here: In Bill 118, and only six bills later, in Bill 126, we have a different story. In Bill 118, he is very, very encouraging and wants to make sure that the rules respecting carpooling are as broad and inclusive as possible, so that we can do the right thing and have more people in fewer cars on our highways. But then in Bill 126, we do the exact opposite; we restrict people from carpooling.

I'll give you an example. My son is 17 years old, and I would say he is at least as good a driver as me—some people would say that's not saying much.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I realize that; I knew I set myself up there.

Anyway, he's an excellent driver and a very responsible driver. In fact, I can tell you that if he is driving and I call him on his cellphone, I'll get a call back a few minutes later, because he won't answer the phone. He'll pull over before he returns that call. Last Friday night, he asked if he could have my van. I said, "Sure. What do you need it for?" "Well, a few of us are going to a movie in Pembroke." Now, we live in Barry's Bay, which is 80 kilometres from Pembroke. The nearest movie theatre is in Pembroke.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Paradise.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, they're both pretty darned nice, I might say to the minister.

If he could only take one friend to the movies, under this proposed Bill 126, that's just not right. People who live in rural areas will be so unfairly treated by this bill that it's just unbelievable. But that's another bill, and I'm sure we will have a chance to discuss it at a later time, if the ministry even calls that bill for debate. Maybe he has realized it's so wrought with holes that he's going to just withdraw it and come back with something better—I don't know. Hopefully he will, because that bill is a big problem.

Anyway, we want to get moving on Bill 118. I will be voting for the legislation, but I'll also expect to be able to discuss this in committee, so that some of the very appropriate amendments that will do everything to improve the bill have a chance to be vetted. I thank you very much for the opportunity.

0940

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I would like to take this time to agree with my colleagues from the official opposition. There are some concerns we have about Bill 118, but the actual bill itself is a good thing. We obviously would like to deal with some of these things at committee, and I hope that the government, in its infinite wisdom, will listen to other people's ideas at the committee level. Actually, we're very concerned about transportation vehicles transporting equipment, and of course trucking firms have great concerns. These will have to be dealt with, and I'm sure that the minister will listen carefully to the people who make their living driving and transferring goods across our province and across the country.

I must also take this opportunity to commend the minister for bringing this forward. It's good legislation, but obviously there are a couple of holes in it that we would like filled. I think with some co-operation with the government at the committee level, we will address those holes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Under questions and comments, I watched on television, first of all, the opposition critic Mr. Klees; then I had a chance to come into the House and listen to him, and then listen to my friend from Barry's Bay make a presentation; then the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek—all good presentations—and finally, my good friend Mr. Turnbull, who is a former Minister of Transportation. We all recognize this.

I think the benefit I personally have found in my many years in this Legislature is the kind of debate that takes place. If the debate is meaningless in the House and in committee, then we really haven't achieved what we want to achieve. I've always said that not all the wisdom resides on the government side of the House; not all the wisdom resides in the Ontario Legislature. That means that the more input we get on legislation, the better. I am a great fan of seeing legislation go to committee, where the public gets a chance to present, and then it may go to further consideration in clause-by-clause. The government will put forward some amendments that they may steal from the opposition members who suggested them, but we will always give credit; also, the opposition members may put some forward.

I think one of the unfortunate things in the whole operation of this House over the years has been that there's always been a great reluctance to accept amendments, yet many of the amendments would make legislation better. So I welcome the input on this bill. We had a previous bill that we dealt with that's already passed the Legislature, the more secure driver's licence; we have another bill that we're considering. All the input we get is extremely valuable to us, from right across the province. I always give that very great weight and consideration, and my good friend from Barry's Bay, the critic for the Conservative Party, the member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek and my own members I'm sure will all give me good advice.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I do appreciate the opportunity to make just a few comments with respect to this bill dealing with hand-held communication devices.

I would echo the comments made by my colleagues the members from Newmarket-Aurora and Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, who have indicated our support in principle for this bill, because of course the genesis for this bill lies with the work done by another one of our colleagues, the member from Durham, who has brought a variation of this bill forward on several occasions, concerned as he is with the public safety aspects of driving while holding cellphones and so on. He's been quite tenacious in that respect.

But of course we're not happy with all aspects of this bill, nor are we happy with the aspect of the new young drivers bill that has been brought forward by the government. Certainly the Premier has indicated that perhaps they were a little bit hasty in coming forward with this bill, with some of the comments that he has been making

about backing away from some of the more controversial parts of it. I would certainly encourage the government to take the time necessary to hear all the comments to be made by both the opposition members and the public with respect to this bill, to make sure that the primary consideration, as it is with public safety, is what is actually dealt with in this bill while not compromising, of course, anything else in the process but still listening to the legitimate concerns of business in this area. I would hope that, as far as that is concerned, they would certainly do so with the next bill and perhaps even send that out for further consultation before it goes through second reading—I think that has been suggested by many people—because there are many practical considerations, particularly as have been mentioned with the prohibition on a driver with more than one friend.

In terms of practical concerns, I have three 17-year-olds who could be driving together with one friend, which I'm sure would cause some concern or at least speculation on the police having to take a look at them at any given time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Seeing none, the honourable member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I appreciate the comments from the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, the minister, and the member from Whitby-Oshawa.

What I heard from the minister was, I would say, a very conciliatory tone with respect not only to this bill, but the general operation of this House. I'm really pleased to hear that because, while I think there are amendments that will improve this bill, and amendments could be brought forward that will certainly make it more streamlined and easier to work, other bills maybe aren't quite the same. These amendments that we are proposing in Bill 118 are far less controversial than might be some amendments in another bill—like Bill 126, which we've talked about. I hope that the minister will be as conciliatory and understanding about, certainly, the non-monopoly of the government on the wisdom of bringing forth legislation when we're dealing with Bill 126 as well.

I do look forward to this bill going to committee to ensure that the best piece of legislation to improve highway safety is what we get at the end of the day. I want to ensure that they do take into consideration those issues we've raised, such as the communication issues for the Canadian Courier and Logistics Association, which has raised some very significant points with the ability for their businesses to operate efficiently. We have to remember that if they can't operate efficiently, it means more expenses to us in the long run.

I'm just looking at 133—and you're getting up. What's the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Your two minutes have more than expired. Unfortunately, the clock—we had a little malfunction there, but thank you.

Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: I rise today to discuss Bill 118. Once again, I commend the minister for bringing forth this legislation, and I'd also like to send a thank you to Mr. O'Toole for his persistence on bringing this legislation forward over the past couple of years.

I must say at this point that I'm glad to hear the Minister of Transportation stand up in a voice of co-operation at the committee level but, frankly, I must confess I haven't experienced that in my year that I've been here. We've brought forth several good ideas to committees which fell on deaf ears, and the government did not want to even discuss them and just squashed them. Once again, I'm frustrated with the lack of co-operation by the government as to the opposition parties, who have excellent ideas that fall by the wayside—unless it's the government's idea. I must put that point in.

Moving on to the bill itself, this kind of legislation just makes sense. Drivers, pedestrians and cyclists have all had at least one bad experience with a distracted driver talking on their cellphone or other equipment. I myself have had near misses and, frankly, since I've had the privilege—I don't know if it's a privilege—to use the BlackBerry, have been distracted while driving. I don't think it's a very good idea, and I am dead set against those types of devices in cars.

Even back in the days when we didn't have cellphones, iPods and BlackBerries, people had found other ways to distract themselves, whether it be a sandwich or doing their hair or makeup or reading a paper or doing all kinds of things in the car that they shouldn't be doing, so I don't think we need to add to that.

0950

We wonder why it's taken Ontario so long to move forward with this type of legislation. Quebec, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, many of the states in the United States and 30 other countries have restricted the use of cellphones while driving.

There is a significant amount of evidence to support tighter restrictions on the use of cellphones while driving. In Australia, a study in 2005 showed that motorists who used cellphones while driving are four times as likely to crash, causing serious injury to themselves or to other people. The find was supported by the University of Toronto analysis of accidents in Toronto. Another study, out of the University of Utah, concluded that talking on a cellphone while driving is as dangerous as driving while intoxicated.

The Ministry of Transportation has indicated that fines will be \$50 to \$500, and no demerit points will be taken for the violations. I find this not a good idea. I believe that there should be points attached to these violations, because for a lot of these business people, \$50 is no big deal. They could spend that at the local pub or spend it at the variety store quite as easily, and it doesn't faze them.

So \$50 to \$500—I think there should be a fine as well as demerit points attached to this bill. I think they've missed the boat on this one. The fine structure will determine whether the legislation works. I think that without demerit points attached to that, this system could run into problems if it's not dealt with at committee.

We should look to the other provinces in determining what fines are necessary in preventing the use of cellphones while driving. There's enough evidence in Canada to undertake the analysis. For example, Quebec had a three-month grace period followed by a \$100 fine, compared to Nova Scotia's \$165 first-time offender fine and a \$335 fine for the third offence.

Along the same lines, enforcement is crucial. Police resources are already stretched and strained to the limit, and enforcing the new law can be resource-intensive. We hope the plan comes with additional financial resources for the police departments to enforce this new legislation, because you can have a fine and demerit points, but if they're only spot checks I don't know what kind of an effect that's going to have. I think you need to send a strong message to the public, and the only way you can do that is with proper resources. So I hope the government has taken that into consideration on the budget level in these hard times when they've called for people to cut back on their spending and to be cautious of what companies are doing. The government also has to follow that line. When they attach new rules, there's always money that goes along with it. So I hope they can find the resources to back up their legislation.

One of the issues we have with the way the legislation is written is that it may capture some uses it wasn't intended to cover. For example, the bill prevents driving while using a hand-held entertainment device. Does that include iPods to car stereo systems, whether through FM transmitters or physical attachment? Pods are no different from stereo systems, and we worry that they are banned because they may fall into the entertainment category.

Also of concern to us is that many companies use hand-held devices or certain types of tracking equipment in transporting goods. We should allow these companies to continue using their equipment in a safe manner, because obviously the hub of our province is the transportation of goods and services. We must not find ways to impede it, because we're facing infrastructure and transportation problems as it is, whether it be the border or whether it be our crowded highways. To further impede people doing their business of transporting goods in this province could be counterproductive.

We're pleased that the government took this opportunity to amend the Public Vehicles Act to end the antiquated restrictions on ride sharing and allow green companies like PickupPal to operate. For those who don't know, PickupPal is a company that arranges ride sharing over the Internet. They don't take a fee for arranging rides and make money through Internet advertising. This helps people carpool to get to work or to go a longer distance, and it also allows people who may not have known someone on the next street or in the same town going in the same direction on the same day, at the same time, to the same place of employment. This service was definitely a benefit to a lot of people in the province. In the time of pollution control and resource control, this makes sense to us, but because the bill hasn't passed yet, the Ontario Highway Transport Board went through with

issuing a decision against PickupPal, ordering the company to cease most of its operations, which we think was a negative move. We hope they would consider reinstating this service because it was very beneficial to a lot of communities, and a lot of rural communities too, that go further distances, maybe into the city for their employment. We urge the minister to find a way to allow PickupPal to continue operating, even though an order has been issued against it.

We look forward to getting this bill to committee because we feel that there are many experts out there who must be heard, whether it be transportation experts or logistics experts. Actually, experts from individual municipalities would be a crucial part of this exercise because some communities, whether they're rural or urban, require different types and modes of transportation to deal with their daily issues. I would like to see rural people who have long ways to go and urban people—city planners and engineering people would be involved in some of these discussions, because I think it will have a very major impact on our municipalities throughout this province.

The bill restricts the following: equipping a vehicle with a television, computer etc. where the screen is visible by the driver—a big distraction—other than the ones that entertain the kids in the backseat to keep them from being a little bit anxious during their rides to wherever they're going. That's not such a bad idea, but to have it in the driver's view is a big mistake. There are enough distractions on the road without watching your favourite *The Young and the Restless*, or whatever you're watching.

Exceptions are made for GPS devices. Yes, I believe these devices are good for when you're lost; their tracking devices are great. But I think you should be pulling over to the side of the road when you're punching in where you want to go or where you're lost, because that's extremely distracting too. I've even had friends who have almost hit other vehicles because they were lost and trying to find out on that device sitting on their dash, or even on the window of their car, where they're going. But I do believe that the voice-activated ones that say, "Turn right here, turn left there," would be beneficial if they were put into a position in the car that doesn't distract the actual driver. I'm sure the passenger could handle any directions with ease with these additional devices.

Trucking equipment, collision avoidance systems, fire and ambulance uses—driving while using a hand-held device capable of being a phone or for sending e-mails, text messages: big mistake. How can you drive? Some of these BlackBerries are so small that you have to really concentrate. You may have a large finger and push two letters at the same time or miss the call, or someone is trying to get hold of you—a big, big distraction while you're driving. It shouldn't be allowed, and I think that's a thing we really have to enforce.

I'm in favour of the hands-free mode. I believe that, attached to your dash, voice-activated measures that

don't require distraction by you while you listen or respond while watching the road, not while looking around for your device, would be beneficial as well. The restriction includes streetcars, snow vehicles and other types of vehicles. I'm not quite sure about snow vehicles on the trails. You may require this equipment, if you get stranded or are in a bad blizzard, to find out where you are. But there's no reason why you couldn't pull over your snowmobile, your racing boat or your Sea-Doo or Ski-Doo to find out where you are and how to get back without being distracted from your driving ability and endangering other snowmobilers, other boaters or other modes of transportation.

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For those people who are concerned about this, I do believe we can straighten this out in committee. I hope this government will take it upon themselves to listen to us and actually listen to some of our amendments and not just—I mean, for the last bill we did clause-by-clause with the government, I had 17 amendments, and the government didn't look at any of them, didn't want to deal with them. They just moved on straight ahead, tunnel vision: They know better than us; we don't know anything.

It's very unfortunate that in my short tenure in this building I've seen this type of people dealing with situations, and I hope that changes in the next session. I hope they are going to entertain some of our bills, whether they be private—just because they're a private member's bill doesn't mean they're bad. Private members' bills can be amended, too; they can come up for discussion. The government can throw in their two cents on what they don't like about a private member's bill, but they don't even bother to do that. They don't even want to deal with it. That's amazing. I can't believe how this government functions when they pass up hundreds of excellent ideas and input from all members on this side of the House.

Until governments in Canada and Ontario and anywhere else start to learn to co-operate and use all the people in this House to the fullest of their abilities, use their contributions, then I think we're falling far short of what should be for the people of this province and what's best for Ontario. In closing, maybe this time they might listen to us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to follow my colleague. Certainly, we in the NDP are going to support this bill. It's a nice little bill; there are four pages to it.

I, as well, urge the government to look at amendments. Clearly, we've heard some of the problems, enforcement being a huge one. I know that the Police Association of Ontario laughed at it when they came to lobby me and said, "Our officers are so overstretched and so underfunded; how do they expect us to ever enforce this sort of legislation?" They thought it was, more or less, a joke. So certainly we would push for financial resources to add to the policing services so they can enforce it.

But more importantly, if you were just a Magna worker who was laid off and went home and turned on the

television this morning and expected to see your elected representatives deal with the real crises in Ontario, the fact that we've lost over 250,000 manufacturing jobs and just lost another 850 this morning in the auto sector—and we still have a government that hasn't come forward with a plan for the auto sector. This is what we should be dealing with in this House.

Is this a nice little bill? Yes. Is it something we should do? Absolutely. But what I think all Ontarians look to their government to do is to take real action, not just to make the chairs more secure and safer on the Titanic, but actually to look at the direction the ship is sailing in—and hey, maybe the berg has already hit us. That's what Ontarians expect when one in six children live in poverty.

Yes, this and other bills that the government brings forward: nothing wrong with them. I'm sure 90% of Ontarians support them. But this is a government with a huge majority. This is a time for bold action. They could take that bold action. They can do anything they want. Why don't they do something about the real issues that are facing Ontarians? Why don't they help that Magna worker who just turned on the television set, who just found out that she had lost her job? Let's deal with that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Seeing none, the honourable member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, if you would like, you do have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd just like to make a short comment. I would like to thank my colleague. She makes a very good point: that since I've been here, we've dealt with some bills that have to be done eventually. But I would say the important things—the economy, jobs—really have fallen short on the list of things to do. Some people in this House have called some of these bills “fluff bills,” bills that are just filling in time, filling in talking, filling in space. But for the real bills that should be dealt with, the government has no answers.

It's tough times, I agree. But in tough times, tough people come out. In tough times, people make good decisions; they make strong decisions. I can't say I've seen this from this government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Seeing none, Mr. Bradley has moved second reading of Bill 118, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of devices with display screens and handheld communication and entertainment devices and to amend the Public Vehicles Act with respect to car pool vehicles.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'd ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on General Government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred? Agreed.

Orders of the day.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I just had a note brought in. There's no further business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): There being no further business, this House stands in recess until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1005 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I'm pleased to inform the members of the assembly that recipients of the 2008 Attorney General's Victim Services Awards of Distinction will be visitors to the gallery this morning. They're victims of crime whose courage and dedication raised the profile of victims' issues in Ontario as volunteers and professionals who provide outstanding service to victims. They are Louise Russo; Travis Bailey; John Dick; Mike Neuts; Glenna Byers; Kathleen Fitzgerald; Brenda LaForme; Danielle Ridge; Céline Pelletier, au nom de l'Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes; Carol Barkwell on behalf of Luke's Place; Nigel Couch, on behalf of Multi-cultural Council of Windsor and Essex County; Joan Chandler, on behalf of Sheatre; and Shirley Hickman, on behalf of Threads of Life. Please join me in congratulating them on the work that they do.

Mr. Mario Sergio: I'm delighted today to have Mr. Pulcini and the 10th graders from Cardinal McGuigan separate school. They are in the east balcony here today. I'd like to welcome them to Queen's Park. I hope they will enjoy their visit today.

Hon. Michael Chan: I'm pleased on behalf of page Kush Thaker to welcome and introduce his uncle, Rakesh Joshi; and his cousins, Raj Joshi, Ashka Joshi, Keyor Joshi and Mansi Joshi. They're sitting in the public gallery.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I'm very pleased to welcome my dear cousin from British Columbia—Vernon, BC—Virginia Wolfe, and her husband, David.

Interjection: Who's afraid of her?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: No one's afraid of Virginia.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I want to welcome the grade 12 students and their teacher from St. Aloysius Gonzaga Secondary School, from my riding, to the Legislature.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I want to take the opportunity to welcome page Rohan Pavone from the Scarborough part of the riding. His family is here today: his mother, Dr. Rosemarie Lall; his father, Dr. Leo Pavone; his sister Damiana Pavone; his brother Sanjay Pavone; and his grandmother Francesca Pavone. They're in the public gallery today.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'm pleased to welcome, in the west members' gallery, members of our model youth parliament, Mac Moreau, Kurtis McAleer and Brooke Longhurst. These involved youth are from my riding of Ajax-Pickering. Welcome.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I'd like to welcome teacher Darshan Harricharran and the students from T.L. Kennedy Secondary School here to the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of page Luis Vera, we'd like to welcome back a family friend of his sitting in the west public gallery, Pat Taylor. Welcome to Queen's Park.

There being no further introductions, it is now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. Today, 850 employees and their families find themselves trying to cope with the shocking news that two Magna plants are shutting down in Newmarket and Aurora.

The auto sector is in a crisis, and this government has no response. Two months ago, I asked the Premier to look into why an auto sector business in my riding had been approved for funding earlier from the Next Generation of Jobs Fund, and yet not one cent had been received.

To the Premier's credit, he obviously looked into it because the next day that employer got a call from the Ministry of Economic Development saying a cheque will be prepared and it should be there soon. This morning, I spoke to the president of that company, who has yet to see one red cent. What he has received is more red tape.

I want to know this from the Premier, or the Minister of Economic Development if the Premier isn't here: Why, on the one hand, can they continue to boast about a \$1.5-billion aid plan and not one red cent is being delivered to the businesses that need it while plants are shutting down in this province?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Firstly, obviously, everybody here knows that the news from Magna yesterday was brutal news for those workers. We do, in our government, through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, make people available to try to assist those workers. They will be laid off in June, it was announced. It is brutal news, it is tough news, it is news that will have a very devastating effect on those families and, of course, as well, in your community.

I did speak with senior executives at Magna today. They reassure me that Magna remains the healthiest auto supplier in North America, with significant liquidity. As a result of the 30% contraction in sales of automobiles, as a result of the shrinkage of that demand, there has been shrinkage of supply, and that accounts for what has happened, which makes it tough news for the people in your riding—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: What I want the minister to address is the fact that back in March they announced a \$1.5-billion jobs fund. Applications have been made—no response from this government. I want to know from the minister why, as recently as yesterday, his official told the president of Axiom Corp. that they could expect to

receive no funding from this program until February of next year. What is that all about?

Hon. Michael Bryant: This is a program that, in fact, provides dollars that are leveraged into an even greater investment. It is a grant. It is a subsidy by the province of Ontario with taxpayer dollars, used to create more investment and more jobs. That is what this program has done and will continue to do.

I note, though, that this is a program that the member voted against. It is difficult to see why, on the one hand, the member can say he's against subsidies and then, on the other hand, say, "You're not spending the subsidies fast enough." It just doesn't make any sense. In any event, we take, nonetheless, that particular application very seriously, and we also want to make sure that the taxpayers' money is given the attention that it deserves.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Frank Klees: The fact of the matter is that this company has been told repeatedly that it's approved, that the money is coming. The fact of the matter is that now, a program that was announced last March, he and his ministry are saying, won't be delivered until February of next year. What is happening here? This is a sham. What I'm asking the minister to do is tell the House, do you have a program? Is the \$1.5 billion there? And if it is, why isn't it in the hands of the businesses that need it rather than being tied up in his ministry in red tape?

We approved of the fact that this government has a program, if it's real. But it's not real. Tell the truth. Either you have a program, and if you do, get it into the hands of the businesses that need it, or fess up and say that it is a—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Well, the member should tell the truth too about how he voted with respect to this subsidy program. He says he's in favour of it now. He probably says it to the company that's in his riding. He probably says it to a lot of the companies in his riding, that in fact this is a great program and "Boy, I'm holding their feet to the fire." But the truth is he voted against it. This side of the House and that side of the House stood up in support of this auto program, stood up in support for the auto suppliers. That side of the House—what do they say? "The market will take care of it. Don't worry. Just cut taxes and somehow, magically, that company is going to find itself with additional investment." Well, it doesn't work that way.

This government will continue to actively intervene to assist those companies that meet the test under the public interest, so that we can grow our auto supply industry. That side of the House, in fact, is totally against that approach and he should stand up and say it.

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HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Health.

Minister, as you well know, hospitals today are operating at almost 100% occupancy. The population is growing and, regrettably, aging. There are more complex needs. We also have areas of growth in the province. Earlier this year, your government committed \$120 million over three years in additional funding to those hospitals in growth areas.

Minister, you were quoted in the Canadian Press today as saying that, yes, hospitals needed more money in growth areas; however, you were not sure that you were going to be able to maintain the funding increase in the next two years. Would you confirm that hospitals will, indeed, receive the growth funding you promised?

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, what I did say to the reporter from the Kitchener-Waterloo Record was that many communities have experienced growth pressures in the province of Ontario, and prior to this government coming to office, it was never recognized by previous governments.

When my colleague the finance minister delivered the budget last March, which, I would point out, this member and her colleagues voted against, we recognized that the GTA-905 and other areas of our province are experiencing population growth and unique needs. We have a co-ordinated plan to address these needs that includes capital investments and wait times initiatives. The 2008 budget announced \$120 million invested over the next three years to help hospitals in the areas experiencing high growth meet the anticipated demand—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: It becomes more clear every day that this government doesn't have a plan and any changes that are made in health care funding seem to be done in a haphazard manner.

In the North Bay Nugget of April 7, your Premier said that he was going to protect public services. Despite this, hospital services are being cut. Despite the fact that you've collected \$12 billion from the health tax, you're cutting funding to the hospitals. We've got St. Mary's, Quinte Health Care, Cornwall, the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, Hamilton Health Sciences, Rouge Valley Health System, and the list goes on and on and on. I ask you today, Minister, why have you broken your promise? Why, in tough times, is the first thing you're cutting health care?

Hon. David Caplan: The member is incorrect. I completely reject the premise of her question. In fact, we are providing additional assistance and support to our hospitals and to our health care partners.

I do recognize that we are in challenging economic times and that our partners must work within the budgets and within the funds that are allocated to them to be able to meet the demands. That's why we've created a plan, which began in 2003, to create local health integration networks made up of people from local communities, working with local partners, whether they be hospital- or community-based providers, to provide the community

services and the hospital-based, institutional-based, services.

The member is incorrect in her assertion. In fact, hospital funding this year is increasing; next year, it's increasing. That was not the case when she was a former Minister of Health and when she was a member of a government which immediately upon taking office—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: The reality is that hospitals this year are receiving a 2.4% increase in funding; next year, it's 2.1%. Regrettably, this government has negotiated contracts with doctors, nurses and others; salaries are going up. Hydro and heating costs and other fixed costs are increasing at a rate of about 4% to 5%. Hospitals are going to have to make cuts. The money is simply not there. We have 100% occupancy today.

We have St. Mary's hospital in my community cutting 10 beds, three outpatient clinics and 17 full-time jobs, including nurses; Quinte Health Care cutting 45 nursing positions; Cornwall has closed their critical care units and one of their two emergency rooms; CHEO is closing six beds; Hamilton Health Sciences, 485 jobs.

I ask you today, why are you cutting health services that your Premier promised to protect?

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, the member points out in her question quite rightly that we are increasing funding, and then she ends her question by saying, why are we cutting funding? She is fundamentally inconsistent. I would quote, for example, that on November 9, 2000, Elizabeth Witmer told hospitals, "Hospital bailouts can't last," Witmer warns. Money needed elsewhere." She said, "We need to consider that the economy may not always be as strong as it is today, in the year 2000, and it may not be possible to provide in the future the size and kind of investment we have seen this year."

Of course, the member went on to point out that we needed to invest in home care, in mental health, in chronic diseases, and I quite agree. In fact, that is the plan that has been implemented by my predecessor, by myself and by this government. This member should in fact stand up and correct her record, because she has pointed out fundamentally incorrect and inconsistent information in the question she asked, and the plan that has been presented in fact is working throughout—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is to the Acting Premier. Suddenly the McGuinty government is talking about spending restraints for MPPs. This looks remarkably similar to the playbook of Stephen Harper: When faced with the loss of hundreds of thousands of good jobs, find something, anything, to distract the public's attention. My question is this: Will the McGuinty government admit that its sudden new focus on so-called restraint is simply a cynical attempt to distract the public of

Ontario from the real issue? Hundreds of thousands of good jobs are being destroyed in the auto sector, the forest sector, the manufacturing sector, and the McGuinty government has no plan.

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite just simply isn't correct. First of all, we are taking a balanced and prudent approach. We began that in the fall statement last year with respect to expenditures and we're doing so in a manner that protects public services. We have said for some time now that the province of Ontario, indeed Canada, was facing an economic tsunami. Unfortunately, those realities are coming to bear. We are continuing to take a balanced approach to overall spending. In my fall statement we did announce a number of measures which were designed to be prudent that at the same time would protect public services.

These are challenging times. We've also had billions of dollars in stimulative initiatives, many of which the member voted and spoke against. We will continue this balanced and prudent approach to help lead Ontario through these very, very challenging economic circumstances.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I don't think the public is going to be fooled by McGuinty government double-talk about restraining MPPs' salaries when it's the McGuinty government that has implemented a 40% pay increase for MPPs over the last year and nine months. I think people are going to see through that.

I also think people will see what the real issue is: When tens of thousands of jobs were lost in the forest sector, when hundreds of thousands of jobs are being lost in manufacturing generally, the McGuinty government had no plan. Now, with the credit crunch threatening hundreds of thousands of indirect and direct auto sector jobs, the McGuinty government's solution is not to have a plan but to talk about symbolic restraint.

My question is simply this: When will the McGuinty government stop the diversions and the distractions and come to grips with the real issue? We're losing hundreds of thousands—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In the fall statement of 2007, in the budget of 2008 and in the fall statement of 2008, this government introduced almost \$10 billion in infrastructure expenses, and that member voted against every dollar. This government voted to put into place a billion dollars in retraining money to help address the needs of unemployed Ontario workers, and that member and his party voted against every single measure. This government has put into place a system to assist and help our manufacturing sector, including grants, including capital cost allowance, including the refund of capital tax to get cash into their hands in these challenging times. That member and his party voted against every single measure.

All of us have to work together as we get through these challenging times with clear—

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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I want the public to understand what the McGuinty government means by "working together." The McGuinty government passes 40% pay increases for MPPs while hundreds of thousands of working Ontarians lose their jobs. That's the McGuinty definition of "working together."

I come back again to the question: When the Liberals were in opposition—and I can quote the finance minister's colleague from Windsor—this is what they said: "In a Liberal government under Dalton McGuinty, we will lead an automotive investment SWAT team to get out there and look for new investment, not sit on our hands like this government has done."

Well, here we go. We've watched the loss of tens of thousands of auto sector jobs. We're witnessing the possibility of the loss of hundreds of thousands of auto sector jobs. My question is, where is the McGuinty SWAT team?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite said that he would donate his increase to charity and produce tax receipts. I challenge you to table the tax receipts, each and every one of you—each and every one of them, Mr. Speaker.

I'll tell you something: Sandra Pupatello and Michael Bryant and Premier McGuinty have been out and generated \$7 billion in investment in the automotive sector. Thank goodness we have people like that, who have the support of Buzz Hargrove, have the support of Ken Lewenza and have the support of the industry.

We are in challenging times. Do you know what he suggested we should do? We should have a jobs commissioner. A jobs commissioner would go to Detroit and say, "Don't cut any jobs, please." Do you know what? Out of concern for working people, out of concern for Ontario communities, this government is standing up for Ontarians, and doing a better job than you, sir, could ever—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: Again to the Deputy Premier—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order. The leader of the third party.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Apparently, members of the McGuinty government don't like to be questioned about the fact that they gave themselves a 40% pay increase at the same time that hundreds of thousands of workers are losing their jobs.

My question to the Deputy Premier is this: As the McGuinty government pats themselves on the shoulder

and tries to tell everyone that they have a brilliant strategy to sustain jobs in Ontario, Magna announced 850 lost jobs yesterday. My question again: Hundreds of thousands of jobs are at stake in Ontario. Where is the McGuinty government's plan to do anything about it?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Michael Bryant: As I said to the member from the official opposition previously, this is brutal news; the announcement of these layoffs is brutal news—brutal for those families, for those people and for that community. It is unfortunate that supply and demand have gone down by about 30%. Consumers, people buying cars, bought 30% less cars in an amount of time that is just completely unprecedented. As a result of that, obviously supply has gone down. That is going to affect suppliers. Magna, fortunately a great global leader in the area of auto supplies and auto parts, is in very healthy financial shape, I am assured. It is in fact in the healthiest financial shape within its industry and is not facing liquidity challenges whatsoever.

We will do everything we can to work with those workers leading up to the June date—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again, the McGuinty government tries to offer up excuses. Here is the reality: Yes, Magna is a very large corporation. It has deep pockets, it has lots of connections in the financial community, but most of the auto parts manufacturers are very small companies. They don't have deep pockets. They don't have five or six banks backing them up. If Magna is cutting hundreds of jobs, what it means is that the small auto parts manufacturers are about to go over the cliff.

I come back to the question again. The McGuinty government was oh, so quick to raise MPPs' salaries by 40% in less than two years. A simple question: Where is the McGuinty government's plan to help all of those small auto parts manufacturers who are about to go over the cliff? Where's the McGuinty government's plan?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The McGuinty government has had a plan in place to support the auto industry, the automakers and the auto suppliers. We brought it in and—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I'm trying to listen to the response from the minister to a question that was asked and I'm hearing cross-conversation. If you want to have these conversations, take them outside. Don't interrupt the flow of question period, please.

Minister?

Hon. Michael Bryant: These investments made by the McGuinty government created additional investments from the private sector and created literally thousands of jobs. These programs remain in place and these programs continue to be utilized by companies.

The credit crunch from both the consumer end—consumers who cannot get financing—and with respect to

those auto suppliers that need more cash flow in order to continue and are not getting it, because they're not getting that financing—that credit crunch, on top of the fact that sales went down 30%, is going to lead to and has led to a contraction of the market. Everything the McGuinty government is doing is seeking to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Every time a member of the McGuinty government gets up, they try to rewrite history. They try to say that thousands of jobs have been created in the auto sector.

Yes, you gave \$200 million to General Motors, and General Motors proceeded to lay off thousands of GM workers. Yes, you gave over \$100 million to Ford, and Ford has been laying off workers. There has been layoff after layoff after layoff, and the conference board says there are going to be more layoffs. That's not the issue. The issue is this: Without access to financial credit for the manufacturers, the parts suppliers, the tool and die makers, the car dealers and the leasing companies, this vital sector, which is responsible for hundreds of thousands of jobs, especially in southern Ontario, is going to suffer massive losses.

My question again: You're so quick to give yourself a 40% pay increase. Where's your plan to help sustain the hundreds of thousands of jobs that are at risk?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The member knows full well that when we brought forward these investments, New Democrats and the leader of the New Democrats did not support them; they voted against them.

In the case of one investment, the member stood up and said that we didn't put enough strings and conditions on the investment. Now he's standing up and he's saying we should write blank cheques to every single person who asks for one, but we're not going to do that. What we're going to do is work with the industry. What we're going to do is work with the workers. What we're going to do is work not only with the suppliers and the automakers but also with the distributors. We are going to make sure that taxpayer dollars are spent wisely, but they will be spent and invested in companies to allow them to grow. They will be spent and invested in companies all across this province to allow all those parts of the auto industry to grow. We will have a thriving and strong auto industry in Ontario in years and years to come and it will be no—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Minister of Finance. The minister knows that for several years now the Progressive Conservative Party has been expressing concern about your government's spending practices, concerns that you've simply ignored.

With the economic crash in the past few weeks, you and your Premier have been acting like a deer in the

headlights, paralyzed with respect to how to respond to the situation until yesterday, when you finally indicated you will bring in a restraint program, but there's a catch to it. The Premier says it will only be symbolic.

Given the challenges your government is facing and that this province is facing, is that the best you can do: a symbolism? Another public relations exercise?

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Hon. Dwight Duncan: In my budget of last spring, we announced and have now saved \$200 million in streamlined purchasing process, vendor rebates and new vendors of record. That member voted against it. We saved \$100 million in consolidation of IT services, reduced inbound toll-free and outbound long-distance telephone costs. That member and his party voted against it. We have achieved and saved \$50 million in reduced accommodation costs. That member and his party voted against it.

We have more to do. I'll have more to say about that, likely early next week, but this government has taken appropriate steps throughout these challenging times. And every time we've done that, they've voted against them.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: In April 2007, we sponsored an opposition day calling on you to curtail spending in recognition of the growing economic challenges. Virtually every other government in this country has acted over the past couple of years.

I'll give you a couple of examples of your government's response: the administration budget for the Ministry of Agriculture, up 22%; tourism, up 21% this year—this year. The administration budget for the Ministry of Government Services has increased 86% in the last two years; over 50% this year alone. What that ministry has spent on hotels is up 78% last year, and that's \$100,000-plus at the Royal York Hotel. Those administrative costs have gone through the roof.

Minister, how can you talk of symbolic restraint when there are parents and families in this province who'll have a very difficult time putting a good dinner in front of their family at Christmas? How can that be symbolic?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I was interested to hear the member now speaking against assistance to our pork farmers, our horticultural sector and others, which you, sir, called on us to do. Now you're criticizing us.

There are challenging times in the economy. We have managed the province's finances in a responsible and prudent fashion. There's no doubt that we can do better, and we will. That's why, for instance, we brought freedom of information to Ontario Power Generation. And what did we discover? That that member and his government had a luxury booth at the Air Canada Centre and a number of his colleagues had the opportunity to be hosted. There's a number of other things like that that we will be talking about over the next few days. But we're taking a prudent and balanced approach to the management of the expenses of the province of Ontario and leading Ontario through these very, very difficult times.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. This week, St. Mary's hospital in Waterloo region announced plans to eliminate good jobs and vital medical services in order to balance its books. Hospitals in Waterloo region have been chronically underfunded and yet the minister maintains that services should not be cut. How does he suggest that underfunded hospitals do that without allowing greater privatization to creep into our public health care system?

Hon. David Caplan: I think it's important to put a few facts on the table. Funding for St. Mary's has increased 30% in base funding over the course of the last five years. In addition, we've invested almost \$38 million in Waterloo Wellington Local Health Integration alone toward the three-year local aging at home strategy, which drives services into the community close to where seniors and their family members need them.

In addition to that, we've invested \$560,000 for 499 general surgeries. That's in addition to the almost \$27 million in total funding that St. Mary's has received since 2004 to reduce wait times at the hospital. That's 17,000 more surgeries. So I reject the premise of the question which says that there is underfunding. In fact, there is considerable additional funding that this hospital has received.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The minister talked about St. Mary's, but St. Mary's is just one of many hospitals across Ontario being forced to make substantial cuts and difficult decisions that affect the communities they serve. We have witnessed similar decisions being made recently at hospitals in Hamilton and right here in Toronto. Rather than allowing our public health care system to be dismantled, brick by brick, nurse by nurse, why won't this minister recognize the importance of properly funding our hospitals here in Ontario?

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, there is a plan that has been in place since 2003 where we embarked on an unprecedented investment to build a more sustainable health care system in the province of Ontario. Health care spending has increased by 37%—31% to hospital funding alone; the province's wait times are down in almost every category right across the board; over 100 hospital capital projects are underway; 630,000 more Ontarians have access to a family doctor who previously did not; and contrary to the member's suggestion, 8,900 more nurses have been hired in the province of Ontario. That follows over 3,000 who were cut under the NDP and a 6,000-nurse reduction under the Conservatives. We have had a 50% increase, over \$1 billion, to long-term-care funding, \$95 million to community health centres and the largest expansion of community health centres in this province's history.

This is the plan for better health care in the province—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Attorney General. Figures released by Statistics Canada tell us that the national crime rate is declining and that Ontario's crime rate was the lowest in Canada last year. I know that since 2003, this government has been tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. We have made unprecedented investments to combat guns and gangs. We are helping to build healthy neighbourhoods through investments in better housing, safe schools, after-school activities and programs for at-risk youth.

But when violent crimes are committed, I know that my constituents are concerned that these crimes happen in spite of the steps we have taken to prevent them. We are moved and saddened by the impact on victims, but we also want to know that everything that can be done is being done to prevent similar crimes from occurring in the future. Can the Attorney General tell this House what further steps we are now taking to fight—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I know we all share the sentiment of my colleague from Guelph–Wellington that we need a system that makes sure that the violent and the dangerous are not endangering us in our communities.

There have been a lot of initiatives taken over the past five years: investments in the guns and gangs task force, more police on the streets. The next step is to make the system work more effectively. We've launched a justice-on-target strategy to reduce the number of times cases go to court for adjournments. That sounds like a strategy just to reduce the number of adjournments, but it really will protect our communities, and it does it in this way: The less time our police officers spend in court waiting for adjournments, the more time they're on the street preventing crime and investigating the crime that does occur. It's about moving resources from the less serious to the most serious. That will keep our communities safer.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Our police and crown prosecutors work hard to keep Ontario families and communities safe, but we've all heard about the revolving door of justice and are concerned about repeat offenders getting back onto the streets.

I have spoken in this House before about the fact that the Criminal Code of Canada allows judges to consider pre-trial custody when determining the appropriate sentence. The principle of two-for-one credit, and in some cases three-for-one credit, has been widely recognized by the courts. I know that our government has asked the federal government to amend the Criminal Code to limit pre-trial custody. I also know that this government is working closely with our provincial justice partners. This week, we heard that the Attorney General and the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services met with our policing partners to discuss additional ways of keeping violent offenders behind bars. Can the Attorney General tell us what came out of that meeting—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The member for Guelph–Wellington is right: She and many others have risen in this House to speak about what we need to do, what we can do, what we must do to protect our communities.

We've got a very good working relationship with our justice partners and our police partners. This week, my colleague Rick Bartolucci and I had a meeting with Chief Davidson, Chief Blair and Commissioner Fantino to discuss what more we can do with respect to the most violent and the most dangerous—and we're talking about, as Chief Blair would say, hundreds, not thousands.

We have now struck an exit point task force to address what are sometimes called the three points in the revolving door of justice: bail, sentencing and the parole post-sentencing stage. The goal is to make sure that the courts and the police have all of the information and supports they need to direct to the most violent and the most dangerous so we get the result we must.

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AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development. President-elect Obama has specifically spoken about the repatriation of jobs back to the United States. Locally, we constantly hear about the potential loss of the head office or even posturing between the UAW and the CAW for job protection.

I know that two weeks ago tomorrow, the Premier was briefed by the auto sector, and the auto sector specifically asked that the percentage by which the auto sector is employed in Ontario and Canada will receive an equivalent percentage of support to ensure that the US perception is not that supporting the auto sector would take place in Canada by their funding support.

Minister, in the December 2 presentation for support, will the auto sector receive a parallel level of support by the province of Ontario to at least ensure that the jobs stay here, and we don't have repatriation of our jobs to the United States?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I understand and appreciate very much the important issue that the member is raising with respect to the concerns and risks around the future of the auto industry in light of whatever terms might be attached to US assistance, particularly, say, congressional assistance.

This is a matter that was taken up when Minister Clement and I were in Washington. We're confident at the present time that the leadership within both Democrats and Republicans are fully aware of the fact that we have a very integrated North American market, such that what hurts Canadian automakers hurts American suppliers and distributors and vice versa.

I appreciate the member's question. It's certainly at the front of our mind. We're going to continue to keep a very close eye on that and continue to do the due diligence necessary—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Minister, in the event that repatriation is moved forward with in the United States and we lose a significant number of jobs or positions in Ontario, is there some plan that you have to come forward in order to ensure that we do the very best we can to maintain those jobs here? We are learning on a regular basis about the loss of jobs, but the potential loss due to repatriation is huge in the auto sector, and anything you can apply or add to that sector would certainly be beneficial. Can you enlighten us on that, Minister?

Hon. Michael Bryant: It is important that the federal government, through the embassy and every other means, continue to track what kinds of terms and issues in fact are part of the broader package that may be before Congress. Working with Ontario, this has become an important issue and we want to make sure we have something in place in the event that there is a challenge. I can say that we are very confident right now that it is not, but we take it very seriously so we continue to monitor it. Obviously, as we approach that date and we receive more information from the automakers themselves, which we have sought, once we have the financials and once we have more details on the longer-term prognosis of jobs in Canada, we'll be in a better position to make a decision.

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is to the Minister of Energy. If the construction of new nuclear power plants is as affordable and as viable as the McGuinty government claims, why has Westinghouse, one of the three bidders to build new nuclear power reactors in Darlington, suddenly dropped out of the McGuinty government's bidding process?

Hon. George Smitherman: The story in today's *Globe and Mail*, to the very best of the information I have available, is erroneous on that. Westinghouse has, as recently as a few days ago, been in touch with and submitted paperwork to Infrastructure Ontario, which is leading this process.

We're working very vigorously to ensure that as we go forward, the ratepayers in the province of Ontario will have the advantage of a competitive process which will result in the construction of two new nuclear reactors at Darlington. It's a huge stimulus from the standpoint of construction and a huge source of reliable electricity going forward, part and parcel of the energy supply mix which has been part and parcel of Ontario's energy supply mix for going on 30 or 40 years.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The minister tried very hard not to answer the question. The fact of the matter is, Westinghouse may be willing to supply some equipment, but they're not interested in the bidding process that the McGuinty government has outlined. Why? The *Globe and Mail* is very specific: because of the company's con-

cerns about how much of the risk the company would be asked to assume for any cost overruns and delays. Westinghouse officials aren't stupid. They know that every nuclear power project in Ontario has gone over budget, in some cases billions and billions over budget. They know that most of the new nuclear power construction elsewhere in the world is going billions of dollars over budget.

My question is this: When will the McGuinty government finally realize that its nuclear mega scheme to pour tens of billions of dollars into a source of power that is neither safe, reliable, nor affordable—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. George Smitherman: I think that the honourable member standing today in a province where 50% of the baseload supply is coming from a form of energy which the honourable member has just characterized as neither reliable nor safe—that is a rather extraordinary comment on that member's part. I know that the honourable member has written a book, which has often been referred to, on the matter of energy, but I must confess that a coherent policy from that party with respect to energy does seem to be lacking.

Here in Ontario, we believe that we should have renewal of our nuclear fleet. For 30 or 40 years, it has been a staple of the energy supply mix in the province of Ontario. We hope to make further progress on conservation and renewables alongside that, as we undertake the single biggest climate change initiative in North America, which is the elimination of coal from the Ontario energy supply mix.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Jim Brownell: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Minister, on October 15 of this year, I hosted a Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry day here at Queen's Park. This was a great opportunity for community leaders of my riding to talk to ministers about the challenges they are facing, the initiatives they are taking to address those challenges, and ways in which our government can assist in these endeavours.

I want to commend all those from my riding who are members of A Quality of Life for All, a group with representatives from the social services sector, for the work they do both with their agencies, such as the Social Development Council, the Agapè Centre, the Red Cross, and the municipalities, through their joint efforts to address the social inequalities in my riding.

Minister, this government understands the importance of assisting these agencies in their important work. Could you elaborate on some of the supports the McGuinty government has in place to assist groups such as the ones I've just identified from my riding?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, let me thank the member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry for all the work that he's doing in his community.

Yes, indeed, on October 15 I met very dedicated members of his community, and I was very glad to listen to their concerns and good suggestions.

Our government doesn't just listen; we act. Since taking office, we have increased social assistance rates by 9%, after years of cuts by previous governments.

In regard to domestic violence, I was proud to have the opportunity this past year to announce that our government was investing \$18.8 million, which will increase the base budget of women's agencies by 5%. This was one of the 2007 campaign commitments. Also, we have provided \$136 million annually to programs that help reduce domestic violence—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Brownell: I am proud to continue working with those groups and to help foster positive working relationships between local agencies. I believe that these collaborative efforts result in more comprehensive supports for those who are underserved in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Recently, the Social Planning Council of Cornwall and Area, led by Mehroon Kassam, held a poverty reduction forum that addressed poverty issues of importance to the soon-to-be-released poverty reduction strategy. Obviously, there is concern across the province about issues of poverty, especially given the economic climate we now face.

Minister, can you tell us that in preparing this strategy, you have met with and taken into consideration the concerns of groups like the Social Planning Council of my riding and that their concerns will be reflected in your plan?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I'd like to refer that question to the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: First of all, I would like to thank the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and the Social Planning Council of Cornwall, under the very strong leadership of Dr. Kassam, for the work they are doing to champion poverty reduction in the Cornwall area.

One of the most encouraging and, in fact, inspiring learnings we took from meetings with groups across the province like the social planning council is just how powerful individual communities are in the fight against poverty. Throughout the province, Ontarians are developing innovative and local solutions that address the unique needs of their communities. The causes of poverty are different across the province and so the solutions must be as well. We've worked hard at the provincial level to open the conversation, to invite people in to be part of the solution, and that is translating across—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Health. Minister, Premier McGuinty has been very

clear that despite the current economic downturn in Ontario, there will not be any cuts in health care services, but on the ground there's a very different reality.

Last week, Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare announced that it's projecting a deficit this year of \$2.3 million. That will bring their total debt up to \$7.7 million. Mike Provan, chair of the board, commented in the Huntsville Forester last week: "We can't go on like this. It's costing us ... \$300,000 a year just on the interest, on the line of credit, and every million dollars we go over, that's money that should be going to patient care that (ends up) going towards the banks."

The headline in the Almaguin News is, "Cuts Looming After Hospital Deficit Jumps."

Minister, the people in my riding would like to know, What is your plan to deal with this? How can you continue saying health cuts will not happen?

Hon. David Caplan: I'm glad that the member raises the question. In fact, it has been identified going back almost a decade. I know that one of his colleagues, a former Minister of Health from Waterloo, warned hospitals at that time. She said, "We need to consider that the economy may not always be as strong as it is today, that it may not be possible to provide, in the future, the size and kind of investments that we have seen this year." In fact, at the time, as the member would well be aware, there were significant cuts to hospitals and significant cuts to health care.

This government has embarked upon another path and has a different kind of a plan. We've been providing enhanced and increased resources, a 37% increase to hospitals. I don't have the specific figures, but I will obtain them for the member and provide them specifically about the Muskoka and district hospital. But I can tell you that they have received additional funding this year as they have in previous years to their base budgeting, and we will work with them—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Well, Minister, we're already seeing the first signs of cuts to service with the end of the after-hours clinic in Burk's Falls and the upcoming loss of community lab services. There's a genuine concern now that the Burk's Falls health centre will be next on the chopping block.

People in my riding are calling every day with problems in health care. Patients with serious fractures are unable to get transfers to regional hospitals. Residents are calling about delays in joint replacement or arthroscopic procedures. Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare says their biggest problem is that more than a third of their beds are occupied by patients who really need a long-term-care bed, but your government is not doing anything about that.

Minister, people are tired of hearing your excuses. They want to know: What is your plan to deal with these hospital deficits, or are you just going to dump your problems over to the LHINs?

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, local health integration networks are working very well. We are already seeing

examples of local innovation. I would point to a very exciting project in northeast Ontario at Timmins and District Hospital, where we had the LHIN working with the hospital. They've been able to have a unique and innovative strategy, driven by the community, called "wraparound," which has reduced their ALC pressure some 40%. We look toward other innovative solutions in the context of partners who are located there. We have confidence—I have confidence—in our hospitals to take care of critically ill patients, and we'll continue to work with our partners in health care to develop better strategies that reduce emergency room wait times. Increasing access to urgent care is a priority for our government. Our government is committed to tackling emergency department wait times, and that's why the ALC pressures that the member mentioned earlier are a key component. We have already taken action. We have increased—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. This week, the minister boasted that Hamilton has increased its temporary care assistance caseload over the past couple of months. The minister should know that there's more to this picture.

The city of Hamilton, May 6, 2008, information report to the emergency and community services committee showed that the average 2007 temporary care assistance caseload was 250. The statistics provided to me from the minister show a caseload of only 176.

The 2004 Ontario Early Years community profile report from the city of Hamilton shows a distinct 311 TCA cases, whereas the minister's statistics show a meagre 199. Can the minister clarify these constant discrepancies for me?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Let me correct what the member just said. The member is mixing cases and children, because some grandparents have more than one child that they keep. He's mixing both.

The number of cases decreased, and then increased in Hamilton and in the whole province. So the temporary care assistance is here to stay, and we are very proud to respond to the needs of children and to support those who are helping to take care of those children in need.

As I said, we have increased the budget by more than \$3 million. We have more children in care every year. It's about—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: That's a really interesting statement from the minister. By the way, Minister, I've got two letters—you said four people weren't cut off. Two of the four we've contacted have letters from your ministry saying they're cut off, and I'll be happy to share them with you.

There are obvious problems with this program, not only the statistics but the varying interpretations of the

minister's new eligibility criteria. If you read it, Minister, no one will qualify in January. Why is this minister so resistant to getting the fiasco fixed? We want to fix it, Minister. You don't want to help us fix it.

As I've asked in the Legislature and in writing, to the minister again: Will this minister appoint an independent expert fact-finder to audit the temporary care assistance program and report back to this Legislature so we can get to the bottom of it, to the truth?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I'll repeat the number. Let's talk about facts. In Hamilton in July 2008 there were 181 cases; in October there are 185. Province-wide, it has increased by 100 cases in four months.

Let me quote what the administrator of the program for Peterborough, Mrs. Mitchelson, has said: "There has been no change in the city's interpretation of the program, and I have not directed my staff to change their practice for awarding temporary care."

The member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek wants to—it's a scare tactic. He wants to scare the grandparents and those who are taking care of children. What he is saying is not true.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Reza Moridi: My question is for the Minister of Education. This past Friday, I was pleased to attend the press conference organized by the York Region District School Board, along with the Premier and yourself. I know this conference was attended by educators across the province and had representatives from a number of international jurisdictions from as far away as Australia, Finland, England, Ireland and Scotland, among others. These guests had come all this way to have a look into Ontario's education system and were favourably impressed by what they saw in the schools of York region, especially our strong focus on literacy and numeracy. Mr. Speaker, would the minister please outline some of the literacy and numeracy initiatives of this government?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I thank the member for Richmond Hill for his question. It was very exciting to meet with these people from around the world. We had arranged a breakfast to get some feedback from these people, who have been watching what's going on in Ontario, the kinds of resources we've been putting in place to support the students who are here visiting with us today. These are the kids who are benefiting.

In York region alone, we've funded 550 new teachers, over 1,000 more education assistants and 991 more support staff. The primary class sizes in York region are 92% at 20 students or fewer, and that compares with 23% before the cap. But specifically, the literacy and numeracy secretariat has put in place \$25 million across the province for focused interventions. There are 20 schools in York region that are benefiting from those literacy- and numeracy-focused interventions.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary? The member for Oak Ridges-Markham.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Minister, I'm certainly mindful that students not only in York region, but across Ontario, are reaching new heights when it comes to those vital skills of literacy and numeracy. In fact, I'm not surprised the success of our education system attracts interest from around the globe. Ontario students rank among the best in the world in reading and science. On visits to schools in my riding, I have often been struck by the confidence and optimism of students. I know those same qualities were on display for conference delegates to see.

Literacy and numeracy are important, but they don't produce well-rounded students alone. My constituents would like the minister to tell us what other initiatives the ministry has undertaken in this regard.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I thank the member from Oak Ridges–Markham for the question. In fact, the York Region District School Board is one of the leaders in character development. Character development is one of the important parts of the equation in terms of helping a student to develop into a well-rounded citizen. So we've put \$2 million for character development in our schools.

We've also invested \$45 million this year in program enhancement, which is education, programs for arts, physical education, outdoor education, the kinds of things that are supporting conditions for kids to develop into terrific citizens. We've consulted with hundreds of students to get their feedback. We know that there are kids involved in character education forums around the province.

As I heard from one Quest participant, Denis Stewart, who works in Northern Ireland and Scotland, we are building not the best education system in the world, but the best education system for the world. That's what we're doing in Ontario.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Attorney General. Minister, last weekend we both attended a rally here at Queen's Park that was organized by a number of faith communities to support the Varughese and John families. Saramma Varughese and Susan John, as you know, were murdered in their own home allegedly by their next-door neighbour, who was out on bail at the time on several charges of violent sexual assaults.

At the rally, you indicated that you were prepared to do whatever was necessary to protect the public interest and to keep this from happening again. The family has called for a public inquiry. Yesterday, you announced your exit point task force to deal with certain violent offenders as they come before the court. Are you suggesting this task force as an alternative to the full public inquiry that the families are requesting?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We're all not only saddened, but angered by tragedies that occur. It moves us all to ask, "What more can we do?" We have to and we must take whatever steps are necessary to keep our communities safe.

So we had a very good meeting the other day with the chiefs, Chief Davidson, Chief Blair, Commissioner Fan-

tino, and my colleague Minister Bartolucci. We have struck, at the Ministry of the Attorney General, an exit point task force, and we're looking at those three parts of what some call the revolving door of justice where sometimes the most dangerous might slip out: bail, sentencing, and the parole. We're going to bring to bear the expertise from around the province, police and crown expertise, to add to what we already apply to make sure that the dangerous stay where they must, not in our communities.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I would say to the minister that the task force falls far short of the full inquiry that the family members have called for. There are several problems posed with this. First of all, it's only going to be dealing with a very small number of individuals who come before the courts. Secondly, it's only to coordinate the information that comes between the police and the crown attorneys when the matter first comes before the courts. It doesn't deal with what happens when bail is ultimately granted and how that's going to be monitored.

The fact that the coordination between the crown attorneys and police isn't happening right now in itself speaks to the fact that there's a larger systemic issue that needs to be examined. I would say to you again, Minister, will you be calling a full public inquiry into this matter to look at the whole system of bail in the province of Ontario, as these families have been calling for?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The people of Ontario expect us to continually get on with the job and continually improve. There is a lot of coordination, a lot of very hard work, that's going on by the crowns and the police on every one of these serious cases. They are all determined to prosecute these to the full extent of the law. The question is, what more can we do?

The exit point task force is the first step, and we will continue to build on it. It was recognized by Mr. Tory in his interview the other day, when he said, "You can never object to this kind of thing. It sounds good, and it is good." The fact of the matter is, on that matter Mr. Tory had it right. This is a good initiative. It's going to help us increase our ability to make sure that the most dangerous are where they belong and not in our communities.

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Speaker: Earlier, in answer to the question from the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka, I undertook to provide information. The Muskoka Algonquin hospitals received a base funding increase: \$6.972 million—a 17.7% increase in the last five years.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. Michael Bryant: On a point of order, Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent, and I seek unanimous consent, to move a motion regarding the schedule for the House this morning.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I move that government order number 14 be called this morning immediately after deferred votes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.
Motion agreed to.

DEFERRED VOTES

TIME ALLOCATION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have a deferred vote on government notice of motion number 92 on allocation of time on government order number 14.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1137 to 1142.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bentley, Christopher
Best, Margaret
Bradley, James J.
Brownell, Jim
Bryant, Michael
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David
Carroll, Aileen
Chan, Michael
Colle, Mike
Craitor, Kim
Crozier, Bruce
Delaney, Bob

Dickson, Joe
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Gerretsen, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
Matthews, Deborah
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine

Moridi, Reza
Naqvi, Yasir
Oraziotti, David
Phillips, Gerry
Pupatello, Sandra
Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Monique
Smitherman, George
Takhar, Harinder S.
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Elliott, Christine
Gélinas, France
Hudak, Tim
Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
Kormos, Peter

MacLeod, Lisa
Marchese, Rosario
Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Norm
Miller, Paul
Munro, Julia
Murdoch, Bill

Ouellette, Jerry J.
Runciman, Robert W.
Scott, Laurie
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth
Yakubuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 51; the nays are 20.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 26, 2008, I am now required to put the question.

On November 24, Ms. Smith moved that, notwithstanding the order of the House dated May 1, 2008, for the purpose of conducting its 2009 pre-budget consultation, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs shall have authority to meet and adjourn from place to place in Ontario during the week of December 15, 2008.

On November 24, Mr. Hudak moved that the government motion be amended by striking out “during the

week of December 15, 2008” and replacing it with the following: “during the months of January and/or February 2009 when the Legislature is not sitting”—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order.

—“rather than rushing the pre-budget hearings under the cover of Christmas, and in the following 19 vulnerable communities, among the hardest hit by Ontario’s economic downturn: Brampton, Brantford, Cambridge, Chatham, Cornwall, Guelph, Hamilton, Ingersoll, Kitchener-Waterloo, Lindsay, London, Oakville, Oshawa, Owen Sound, Smiths Falls, St. Catharines, St. Thomas, Welland and Windsor.”

We will deal first with the amendment by Mr. Hudak. Is it the pleasure of the House that the amendment carry?

All those in favour will say “aye.”

All those opposed will say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members; this is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1146 to 1151.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We’ll deal first with the motion by Mr. Hudak. All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
Elliott, Christine
Hudak, Tim
Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
MacLeod, Lisa

Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Norm
Munro, Julia
Murdoch, Bill
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Runciman, Robert W.

Scott, Laurie
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth
Yakubuski, John

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bentley, Christopher
Best, Margaret
Bradley, James J.
Brown, Michael A.
Brownell, Jim
Bryant, Michael
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David
Carroll, Aileen
Chan, Michael
Colle, Mike
Crozier, Bruce

Delaney, Bob
Dickson, Joe
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Gerretsen, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
Matthews, Deborah
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil

Meilleur, Madeleine
Moridi, Reza
Naqvi, Yasir
Oraziotti, David
Phillips, Gerry
Pupatello, Sandra
Ramal, Khalil
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Monique
Smitherman, George
Takhar, Harinder S.
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 16; the nays are 48.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion lost.

We will now deal with the main motion by Ms. Smith. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say “aye.”

All those opposed will say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Same vote.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Same vote? I heard a no.

The division bells rang from 1154 to 1159.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We will now deal with the main motion by Ms. Smith.

All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bentley, Christopher
Best, Margaret
Bradley, James J.
Brown, Michael A.
Brownell, Jim
Bryant, Michael
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David
Carroll, Aileen
Chan, Michael
Colle, Mike
Craitor, Kim
Crozier, Bruce
Delaney, Bob

Dickson, Joe
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Gerretsen, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
Matthews, Deborah
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Moridi, Reza

Naqvi, Yasir
Oraziotti, David
Phillips, Gerry
Pupatello, Sandra
Ramal, Khalil
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Monique
Smitherman, George
Takhar, Harinder S.
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Elliott, Christine
Hudak, Tim
Jones, Sylvia
MacLeod, Lisa

Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Norm
Murdoch, Bill
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Runciman, Robert W.

Scott, Laurie
Wilson, Jim
Yakabuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 49; the nays are 13.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1202 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Dave Levac: In the precinct today, representing Ukrainians across the province and the country, we have Mr. Orest Steciw, projects coordinator, League of Ukrainian Canadians; Mr. Eugene Yakovitch, chair, Famine-Genocide Commemorative Committee of Ukraine Canadian Congress, Toronto branch; Mrs. Irka Mychak; Mrs. Marika Szkambara; Mr. Oleh Romanyshyn, president, League of Ukrainian Canadians; Mrs. Chrystyna Bidiak, president, Canadian Women's Congress.

As well, we have with us today a very special visitor in the precinct, Her Excellency Mrs. Kateryna Yushchenko, first lady of Ukraine; Dr. Ihor Ostash, Ambassador of the Ukraine to Canada; Mr. Ihor Lossovskyi, Consul General of the Ukraine in Toronto.

We welcome them and hope their visit is joyous.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to welcome a group of students from Martin Street Junior Public School in their grade 5 class and a special welcome to one of the students, Jake Hunter.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Mr. Frank Klees: The auto industry is in a crisis. Thousands of jobs are at risk and businesses in all sectors of the industry, from manufacturing plants to dealerships, are in jeopardy.

Today, 850 employees and their families are coping with the frightening reality that two Magna plants are shutting down in Newmarket and Aurora. The employees are now faced with the daunting challenge of finding a new job and accessing retraining programs.

I'm calling on the Premier today to commit his government to take immediate action on two fronts:

First, to ensure that the resources of the provincial government are made available to our communities to assist with practical issues, such as retraining and job placement for those affected. And because English is not the first language for many of these employees, now is the time to put in place language-training programs to prepare individuals for their transition to new jobs.

And, second, that the government act immediately to implement a job preservation plan that will facilitate the operational survival of the auto industry in this province.

This is not just about saving a corporate entity; it is about preserving jobs, families and communities.

TERRORIST ATTACKS

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Yesterday, the world watched in horror as terrorists attacked innocent civilians in Mumbai, India. Reports confirm that 100 people have been killed, 300 injured, and Canadians are among the many hostages still being held.

On behalf of the constituents of Mississauga-Brampton South, I condemn this terrorist attack and urge all Canadians to stand united with the people of India against this act of cowardice. Our thoughts are with the victims of this tragedy, and we pray that those who are being held hostage return home to their families and friends safely and as soon as possible.

Those who attempt to destroy a peaceful way of life with fear and venture to solve political, social and economic problems through violence—the civilized world must not allow them to succeed.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Laurie Scott: In my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, the automotive sector is one of the largest employers. The negative economic impact of auto job losses hurts our local businesses, local suppliers

and local manufacturers. The challenges faced by our auto sector also hurt our local dealerships and service centres.

I have received many phone calls, e-mails and letters from concerned constituents about how the provincial government plans to respond to these challenges. They are concerned, as I am, about the workers and the spinoff effect, which is highlighted by the fact that one in seven Ontario jobs is directly or indirectly related to the auto industry.

I and the PC caucus know the tremendous value and quality of auto workers in Ontario. We are also concerned about tax dollars being used to simply bail out the industry.

The fact is, for a number of reasons, which include the current economic state, people are not buying as many vehicles.

This is also what we know: Auto companies and auto makers' unions hold in their hands more answers than government will ever have about how to build a brighter future for their industry. It's a responsibility they must accept, and the unions, along with the companies, need to come forward and demonstrate to Ontarians that they can be part of the solution.

They also need to come forward knowing that Ontario taxpayers have been very generous with them in the past. The McGuinty Liberals have spent a nearly \$1 billion on auto companies, only to see 30,000 well-paying auto manufacturing jobs leaving Ontario.

Furthermore, before any real commitment from Ontario taxpayers, we need a plan from Dalton McGuinty, a plan that includes guarantees and assurances that auto jobs are here for the long term, not just the next crisis.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

Mr. Kuldip Kular: As the year 2008 draws to a close, I would like to acknowledge the services of two exemplary young men as pages to the Legislature.

Through the page program, Mr. Jasdeep Dulku and Mr. Shaukat Khan have taken their first steps to becoming engaged as active citizens in government—their government.

Our society is most vibrant when Ontarians participate in their neighbourhoods, communities and even government. These are the challenges placed upon each of us in a democratic society.

Most adults must manage important and often competing demands for time and energy, such as family and employment. There is little enough time in their day to become involved, except as informed spectators, in the details of government.

Our youth are also challenged with constant distraction. They must attend school, study, socialize with family and friends, pursue hobbies, and plan and work toward their futures. One day, from countless opportunities, they will forge lives for themselves. The future belongs to our youth.

I applaud Jasdeep and Shaukat, therefore, for recognizing and seizing upon a unique opportunity to learn

more about their society and government as they grow and mature into active citizens of Ontario. I offer my personal thanks for their service to this great province, and my best wishes for academic success.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Norm Miller: I rise today to thank the McGuinty government for unfairly targeting teens. You finally found a way to get young people involved in politics.

I have received some wonderful e-mails and letters from young people in response to Bill 126, and I want to share a couple with you. Here's one:

"Mr. Miller, I am a young driver in Muskoka. I agree with the no alcohol consumption, as it should be for everyone—no matter what their age is. What I don't fully agree with is the limited passenger law for drivers under the age of 19.

"People that live in rural areas depend on each other for rides in order to go into town or go to work. Carpooling saves gas, money and helps the environment by not polluting the air. In the area I live in, there are no transit services, and friends often rely on each other to take them where they need to go.

"We as young teenagers have to own up to what we do and make responsible choices. There will always be those few that make the wrong choices and they should definitely get penalized for it, but that doesn't mean we all should."

From another young driver in my riding:

"Mr. Miller, I strongly disagree with Ontario's new driving laws. Sure, the one-passenger limit for the first year of having your G2 licence is fine for teens living in the city. They can take the bus, subway, and taxis are much cheaper in the city. For teens here in Muskoka, the carpool is almost our only way to get anywhere. Teens are saving fuel by transporting more than two people at once. When we have to make several trips to get people somewhere, we are wasting fuel and creating unnecessary pollution."

I hope the government will listen to these young people and recognize the realities of living in rural and northern Ontario.

1310

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Sudbury Regional Hospital is in crisis, as are far too many other hospitals in our province. Bed shortages, surgical cancellations and emergency room delays are the result of a broken home-care system. So too are the alternate-level-of-care patients languishing in our hospitals.

We need bold action for Ontarians to regain confidence in our hospitals, but we can't fix the weakest link in the health care system unless we get rid of competitive bidding and cease our reliance on private for-profit American subsidiaries to provide home care services. Competitive bidding not only destabilizes the home care sector but it also turns the entire health care system on its

head, as Sudbury residents are witnessing right now. I have said it many times: The problem with ALC patients is not a hospital problem. Hospitals are the last safety net to catch those who fall through the cracks. Seniors are not to blame for hospital bed crunches. To the contrary, seniors who find themselves in hospitals as ALC patients are often the innocent victims of our seriously flawed home care system.

If we want a solution, we have to ask ourselves, will we allow our seniors to suffer, our emergency rooms to be overcrowded and surgeries to be cancelled just to hold on to a competitive bidding process that allows large private for-profit companies to make a buck? That's not the Ontario anyone wants. We all deserve better than that.

HAROLD USHER

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I rise in the House today to honour Mr. Harold Usher, who is one of London's hardest-working citizens. As a city councillor, he works tirelessly to bring equity and fairness to civic government and, within his community, to improve the lives of others. His contributions to race and newcomer relations in London are numerous. To list a few, he was president of the London Diversity and Race Relations Advisory Committee and also worked with the London Black History Coordinating Committee.

His work in London-Fanshawe resonated throughout our country. In 1992, he received Canada's commemorative 125th medal from the Governor General for service to his community, his country and Canadians.

He served as a director of Toastmasters International and achieved their highest honour on three occasions as well as their international presidential citation for his dedication.

It is important that we abide by one of Mr. Harold Usher's ethics: It's the responsibility of citizens to make a positive contribution to their community so that they can leave it better than they entered it.

I want to congratulate "Mr. Sensational," as he very often is called, on his dedication and his work. Again, I wish him all the luck.

UKRAINIAN GENOCIDE

Mr. Dave Levac: This year—on Saturday, November 22—was the 75th year of the commemoration of the Holodomor, in which as many as 10 million people perished as victims of the man-made famine in the Ukraine from 1932 to 1933 by Joseph Stalin.

The governments of Ukraine and the United States, UNESCO and the United Nations, and over 40 other jurisdictions around the world, including the Senate of Canada and the government of Canada, have officially declared Holodomor a genocide. That is to say, it was a planned murder by Joseph Stalin's regime of the time, of persons of authority and intellect as well as farmers who supplied grain in this breadbasket of Europe. In addition,

existing grain supplies were exported to world markets, and harsh military restrictions prohibited the people from travelling to areas where food was plentiful. The consequential effect condemned many people to die. It also had a secondary purpose of restricting the reporting of the famine. The outside world didn't know. In fact, the famine remains unknown to many today.

For this reason, I would like to thank the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, the League of Ukrainian Canadians and the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women in particular for their unswerving, continued efforts to educate Ontarians about this horrific crime of the century. To repeat these mistakes of the past would be a great tragedy indeed.

We implore all members to join us this afternoon at 3 o'clock down in the dining room to continue this discussion. I know my colleagues support this endeavour.

OLYMPIC TORCH RELAY

Mr. Jim Brownell: The Olympics is one of the best-known events in the world and features the best athletes of each country competing against each other in the spirit of first-class sportsmanship. A key symbol of the Olympics that unites communities around the world with its journey is the Olympic torch.

Last Friday, it was announced that history was being made, as the Olympic torch relay for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics would be the longest in history to be contained within the host country. The relay will be 100 days in length, will travel to over 1,000 communities across 45,000 kilometres, covering the breadth of this great country, and will connect all Canadians in the spirit of the games.

On day 46 of this relay, December 14, 2009, the torch will pass through the city of Cornwall, in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, and Akwesasne.

Cornwall is an extremely appropriate place for the Olympic torch relay to be celebrated, with a mix of English and French Canadians, the Mohawk First Nations community of Akwesasne as a neighbour, and a vibrant community of new Canadians. Cornwall is a microcosm of our country. Cornwall and all of my riding is truly a representation of all that is best in our country.

I look forward to this momentous occasion, this Olympic torch relay, in the history of Cornwall. I encourage everyone to come and experience the charm of Cornwall, during day 46 of the Olympic torch relay and every day of the year.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Estimates.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Mr. Rinaldi from the Standing Committee on Estimates reports the following resolutions:

“Resolved that supply in the following amounts and to defray the expenses of the following ministries be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009”—

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Dispense.

Report deemed adopted.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

IMMIGRATION INFORMATION

Hon. Michael Chan: I rise today to tell members of this House and Ontarians about a significant step the Ontario government is taking to help municipalities attract investment and talent.

As we all know, the telecommunications revolution has made the world smaller and more interconnected. We are using the power of technology to reach around the world to continue a great Canadian success story: immigration.

On Monday, we launched the latest in a series of municipal portals designed to help regions across the province promote themselves around the world as great places to live, work and do business. My colleague and parliamentary assistant, Linda Jeffrey, has shown strong support in a launch for the Peel site. This site has been recognized as a best-practices model by other provinces.

I want to thank the development team for a job well done. Also, my thanks to the city of Mississauga, the city of Brampton and the town of Caledon, whose officers all worked closely with the regional municipality of Peel on the development of the portal.

We want to attract the best from every corner of the world. Their skills and talents are critical to Ontario's growth and prosperity. These municipal sites will allow us to do this. They are a one-stop source for information on how to work and settle in Ontario communities. They provide information about employment, housing, education, health care, transportation, language training and business opportunities to potential newcomers and investors and to those recently arrived. Whatever the question, the sites provide answers that enable newcomers to make an informed decision when considering Ontario as a new home or place of business.

The government of Ontario is supporting sites in 17 municipalities across the province. Ten sites are now operational, in Toronto, Ottawa, Sudbury, Windsor, London-Middlesex (phase 1), Brantford, Niagara region, Peel region, the county of Lambton, and York region. We are hopeful that the remaining sites in Sault Ste. Marie, Waterloo region, the city of Chatham-Kent, London-Middlesex (phase 2), North Bay, Timmins, Smiths Falls,

and Hamilton will be ready next fall. They will all be linked to the provincial government's site for newcomer information: that is, ontarioimmigration.ca. The idea is to provide seamless access to information across all levels of government—municipal, provincial and federal.

Municipal portals support the government's five-point plan to build a strong economy by attracting investment and talent to Ontario. Today, more than ever, human resources are one of the most valuable assets. The skills, talent and experience that newcomers bring to Ontario augment our province's talent pool and give us an edge when competing in global markets. We need newcomers to keep our economy strong.

Immigrants helped to build the Ontario we are all proud to live in today, and they will continue to build the Ontario of tomorrow.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

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IMMIGRATION INFORMATION

Mr. Norm Miller: I would like to protest the fact that the official opposition and the third party were given no notice of this ministerial statement, as is—I understand from talking to the table it's not a rule, but it certainly is what is normally done around this place, that for ministerial statements there's a bit of lead time given so that we can have our critic here so we can make a response to the ministerial statement and so a little bit of thought can be given to a response.

I want to record that we, the official opposition, protest the fact that no notice was given of this ministerial statement, so as a result, our critic is not here and not able to respond—although he just came in behind me. Maybe he would like to respond, but he hasn't even seen the statement. It's just common courtesy for the government to make the opposition parties aware of what they might be doing a statement on.

This government seems to want to do things quickly and without much scrutiny. We just need to witness the way Bill 119, the WSIB bill, was just introduced. There was a lot of opposition starting to that bill as small construction companies became aware of the fact that they were going to be required to have mandatory WSIB coverage. They introduced the bill, and as quickly as they humanly could do, they passed it through this Legislature in some short two weeks.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stick to the statement, please.

Mr. Norm Miller: I am, because this statement is talking about attracting investment and talent. If they're going to pass bills like Bill 119, they're going to be destroying business in this province and scaring it away from the province. The same is true with Bill 126, the young drivers bill. There's now a groundswell of opposition from young people as they become aware of that bill. I wonder if they're going to pass a time allocation motion on that one to try to rush it through.

On the motion we just voted on this morning to do with the pre-budget hearings, the minister said in his

statement that the municipalities support the five-point plan of the government. Well, how are you going to know, if you're not willing to go around the province and listen to the people of this province, whether they support what you're doing or not? This government has just decided that pre-budget hearings, which would normally be over a course of weeks in January and February and travel around the province and give lots of opportunities for those people who want to make a comment about what's happening in the province—that's the normal course. What is happening this year? We're going to have pre-budget hearings the week before Christmas, when I think the majority of people are not going to be trying to make comments and adding some thoughts about what should be happening in the province of Ontario.

Not only that, but if ever there was a year when we should be listening to the people and businesses affected, it's this year, when the economy is certainly on shaky ground, yet this government is going to hold pre-budget consultations the week before Christmas—a matter of days. So they don't seem very interested in listening to the people of this province. Perhaps it's because of their record. They know their record. They've had huge increases in government spending, some \$28 billion a year in increases in government spending.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): At least try and bring it back to—

Mr. Norm Miller: As I say, this statement's about attracting investment and talent to the province. When you have huge increases in the number of civil servants in the province, four times the number of jobs that have been created in the private sector, you're scaring away investment to the province.

The government has had big increases as well in their administration costs. They obviously are afraid of scrutiny, and that's why they're doing the pre-budget hearings so quickly. That's why they passed Bill 119 so quickly. As I say, it's just unfortunate that our critic—perhaps he wants to respond to this now.

Interjection.

Mr. Norm Miller: As I was pointing out, he hasn't even had a chance to read the statement. We just think this is very unfair, the way the government has popped this on us. I hope it's not something that's going to continue in the future.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: You may have become aware by now that the opposition parties were not advised, as is the protocol, the custom in this chamber, about the ministerial statement by Minister Chan. I acknowledge that the copies of the statement were sent to the opposition benches, and I don't criticize the government for failing to do that. But I say this, and this is my point of order: There has been displayed today, by virtue of the violation of that custom, of that tradition, of that practice, a thorough disdain for the opposition members and for this chamber.

We have nobody else to appeal to, sir, other than you when the government treats opposition caucuses in this

manner. The failure for there to have been even passing mention of this ministerial statement is a gross contempt, I put to you, of this Parliament. I'm asking you, sir, to indicate clearly the Speaker's disapproval of this practice, and I'm asking you to censure the government for its failure to abide by that practice. I'm reserving my right to bring a motion to find the government House leader in contempt.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the honourable member from Welland for his point of order. I will read to the members standing order 35(c), which deals with this issue: "Two copies of each ministerial statement shall be delivered to the leaders of recognized opposition parties, or their representatives, at or before the time the statement is made in the House." It has been the custom to deliver those statements, and that's what I have to go by in any ruling. I think the pertinent words are "at or before the time of the statement." There has been a custom within this House to try to deliver these statements as early as possible, from the government to the two opposition parties, to allow the two opposition parties to research and respond to particular statements.

What the honourable member chooses to do beyond my ruling right now—I would just say to the government members that it has been a long-standing practice, and as someone who has served on both sides of this House and who has either responded to or presented ministerial statements, I would encourage the government members to ensure that those statements are made available at the earliest possible convenience.

Mr. Peter Kormos: May I further ask the Chair to note that the demonstration of disdain is aggravated by the minister's failure to even stay here to listen to the responses?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We understand within this House that we do not make references to the presence or absence of a member, but thank you.

Mr. Peter Shurman: On a point of privilege, Mr. Speaker: I just want to echo the sentiments expressed by the member from Welland and thank the Speaker very much for the point made. I am the critic on two files, and over the course of the past year since I've been in that position, I have received ministerial statements typically 30 to 40 minutes before the fact. Given the fact that I've just taken a glance at what the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration had to say and that his statement pertained to attracting investment and talent, I can assure the Speaker that I would have had quite a bit to say and would appreciate in the future if the government would deliver these on time.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?
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Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Just to echo what you've already heard in this chamber, Mr. Speaker, it may not be in the standing orders, but it has certainly been part of the protocol and custom of this House to give the opposition parties at least some advance knowledge that a statement is coming that will be directed at their area of expertise and critic area. I also have to stand and say that our critic

for citizenship and immigration isn't here. I hope this isn't going to continue as a practice. I thank you for speaking to it.

IMMIGRATION INFORMATION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: As far as the statement goes, there's nothing very wrong with it. I mean, a website—who can it harm? The actual reality is that right now in Ontario we're dealing with a crisis, and it's a crisis among the immigrant communities as well. If this is all this government has to say to those immigrant communities, it's pretty sad indeed.

Just yesterday, we had a couple of immigrants here for a press conference, talking about equal pay for equal work. We're talking about a problem that certainly plagues the immigrant communities. We had CUPE 3903 here; we had SEIU Justice for Janitors. Most of the janitors working in Toronto come from immigrant communities, many of whom are asked to take out their own private incorporation as independent contractors just to get the jobs. By the time they pay their expenses, they earn less than minimum wage.

Why doesn't this government start talking about a living wage? They've had the report. If they want to help immigrants, they should be speaking about a living wage. If they want to help immigrants, they should be talking about affordable housing. We're at a standstill in this province, where affordable housing comes in. We have 125,000 families, many of them headed by a woman—many of them headed by an immigrant woman—who are looking for affordable housing. It's an eight- to 12-year wait. Something must be done about housing if this government is serious about helping immigrants.

If this government is serious about helping immigrants, particularly internationally trained professionals, it needs to act faster on the issue of accreditation. I have a gentleman in my riding, an Iranian surgeon, who works as a baker six months of the year for less than minimum wage. Then he goes back to Iran, where he gets paid as a surgeon for six months so that he can support his family here. They told him, at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, that it would take him 10 years to get accredited. He's in his 40s; he doesn't have 10 years. He'd rather go back to Iran and practise his craft. That's an absolute travesty. It's a travesty when so many—in fact, half a million Ontarians—want for a family doctor.

There's much this government can do when it comes to immigrants, but it doesn't do it. Instead, we get another website for a computer that many immigrants can't afford to have. We have many in my community who are working two and three jobs just to pay the rent, just to feed their families. That's the reality.

Apart from equal pay for equal work, a living minimum wage, affordable housing and a speedier accreditation process for internationally trained professionals, there are other aspects of this government's response that are particularly egregious as well. You heard from the

member from Welland—no time to respond. I hope this doesn't become symptomatic of this government.

I talked this morning about all those laid off—over 250,000 in Ontario now—who are turning on their televisions and watching their representatives in this House. You wouldn't expect they would want to hear about a website; you would expect they would want to hear about action: action on the job front, action on the poverty front and action on the immigration front, because we know that the face of poverty is a face of colour. Instead, what this government does is just make the deck chairs on the Titanic a little bit more comfortable. Now they're providing websites for the people sitting in the deck chairs on the Titanic. But this province of Ontario is the Titanic. When will the government act for immigrants? When will they act for women? When will they act on the poverty file? When will they act on the crisis that is facing our communities—all our communities?

This is non-partisan; this is about action. We need to put our heads together and take action in each of our ridings on the job front, on the poverty front and particularly on the immigration and citizenship front.

PETITIONS

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have petitions to do with WSIB, Bill 119, which unfortunately the government passed this morning, but I shall read it.

"Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 119, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008, which makes WSIB mandatory for independent operators, partners and executive officers in construction; and

"Whereas this bill will cost the average business owner about \$11,000 while doing nothing to catch cheaters in the underground economy; and

"Whereas this bill will do nothing to make workers safer in the workplace; and

"Whereas there has been insufficient consultation with construction companies and stakeholders to discuss the impact of this bill or other alternatives; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government refuses to allow discussion of this bill with the affected parties through the committee process;

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To revoke Bill 119 or to require the Standing Committee on Social Policy to travel across the province of Ontario in order to provide an opportunity for consultation with affected businesses."

TOM LONGBOAT

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Tom Longboat, a proud son of the Onondaga Nation, was one of the most internationally celebrated athletes in Canadian history;

"Whereas Tom Longboat was voted as the number one Canadian athlete of the 20th century by Maclean's magazine for his record-breaking marathon and long-distance triumphs against the world's best;

"Whereas Tom Longboat fought for his country in World War I and was wounded twice during his tour of duty;

"Whereas Tom Longboat is a proud symbol of the outstanding achievements and contributions of Canada's aboriginal people;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario."

I fully support this petition and I give it to page Sarah D.

CAMBRIDGE COURTHOUSE

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition signed by good citizens of Cambridge which reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the McGuinty government plans to close the Cambridge courthouse; and

"Whereas the closing of the Cambridge courthouse could hurt the Galt core, which goes against government objectives to encourage development in the core area; and

"Whereas Cambridge law firms may end up moving to Kitchener as a result; and

"Whereas Cambridge is the second-largest municipality in the regional municipality of Waterloo (and similar in size to many other Ontario cities such as Barrie, Brantford, Guelph, Kingston, Peterborough, St. Catharines, Sarnia, Sudbury etc.), which continues to grow at a rapid rate; and

"Whereas a larger facility with all regional courthouses under one roof could result in higher operating costs;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the government of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government ensure the Cambridge courthouse remain open whether or not a new courthouse is constructed in Kitchener."

As I agree with the contents of this petition, I affix my name thereto and give it to Zac.

TOM LONGBOAT

Mr. Dave Levac: This is on the Tom Longboat Day Act and it's a petition written to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It's an identification of a great Canadian, a great individual, a great First Nations person who happened to have been born in my riding on the territory of the Six Nations of the Grand River.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Tom Longboat is one of Canada's greatest long-distance runners;

"Whereas Tom Longboat served his country in World War I with distinction and was wounded twice;

"Whereas Tom Longboat is a great role model for all Canadians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass the Tom Longboat Day Act into law so that we can honour this remarkable athlete and courageous Canadian who is a great role model for all Canadians."

I sign my name to this petition with pleasure and pass it to Tess, our page.

LOGGING ROUTE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with logging in the village of Restoule. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Nipissing forest management plan proposes to use Hawthorne Drive in Restoule, which features a single-lane bridge and narrow and steep sections; and

"Whereas area residents have grave concerns about community safety, traffic speed, truck noise and general wear and tear of Hawthorne Drive and the bridge in the village of Restoule; and

"Whereas the proposed route travels past the Restoule Canadian Legion and two churches; and

"Whereas alternate routes are possible via Odorizzi Road and Block 09-056;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety and concerns of the people of Restoule ahead of logging interests and ensure an alternate route is selected for the Nipissing forest management plan."

I support this petition.

1340

EMERGENCY DISPATCH SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with 911 services in Parry Sound-Muskoka. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is considering relocating emergency ambulance and fire dispatch services currently provided by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service to the city of Barrie; and

"Whereas up to 40% of all calls received are from cellphones from people unfamiliar with the area; and

"Whereas Parry Sound-Muskoka residents have grave concerns about the effect on emergency response times if dispatch services are provided by dispatchers who are not familiar with the area; and

"Whereas 16 Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care-funded jobs, held by qualified communication officers from local communities, may be lost as a result of the relocation of dispatch services to the city of Barrie,

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety, health and economic concerns of the people of Parry Sound–Muskoka ahead of government efficiency interests and ensure that emergency dispatch services continue to be provided locally by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service."

I support this petition.

EDUCATION LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Peter Shurman: I have a petition from the students at York University.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the strike by CUPE Local 3903 at York University has resulted in classes being cancelled, affecting more than 50,000 students across the greater Toronto area; and

"Whereas the members of CUPE Local 3903 show an unwillingness to bargain in good faith and bring an end to this strike; and

"Whereas York University has offered to resolve this labour dispute through binding arbitration;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Enact back-to-work legislation requiring the termination of any strike or lockout action and requiring this labour dispute to be resolved through binding arbitration."

I fully support this petition and affix my name to it, and I give it to page Sara.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Ms. Laurie Scott: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario is introducing a policy of forcing the sole proprietors, partners, executive officers in a corporation and independent operators in construction to pay workers' compensation premiums on their own earnings in addition to the premiums they already pay on behalf of their employees; and

"Whereas such a policy will inflict an additional \$11,000 average cost on law-abiding business owners in the above-ground economy while doing nothing to root out the law-evading cheaters in the underground economy; and

"Whereas such a policy will not improve access to workplace health and safety education and training since law-abiding businesses already have access to all of these resources and law-evading businesses will continue to hide; and

"Whereas such a policy is not needed to level the playing field, since the rules already require that firms large and small must cover employees, while company leaders are exempt in both cases; and

"Whereas there has been no serious review of alternatives such as tracking who has coverage by name to limit abuse and other insurance options; and

"Whereas such a policy could be extended beyond construction to other sectors; and

"Whereas Ontario's slowing economy is hurting citizens and businesses, also resulting in Ontario becoming a first-time 'have-not' province;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To vote against or repeal any legislation that requires independent operators, executive officers in a corporation, sole proprietors and partners in construction or in any other sector to pay WSIB premiums on their own earnings."

This is signed by many people from all over the riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and brought to me by the CFIB at my riding. I'll hand it to page Zac.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO AMENDMENT ACT (CIGARILLOS), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI FAVORISANT UN ONTARIO SANS FUMÉE (CIGARILLOS)

Mme Gélinas moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 124, An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act with respect to cigarillos / Projet de loi 124, Loi modifiant la Loi favorisant un Ontario sans fumée en ce qui a trait aux cigarillos.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, the honourable member has up to 12 minutes for her presentation.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is an honour for me to rise today before this House to present Bill 124, a bill that will amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act to include a ban on cigarillos. It is also a bill that could make history, because today, for the first time, both sides of the House have joined together to support a private member's bill. I want to thank my colleague Mr. Dave Levac, the member from Brant, who has co-sponsored this bill with me. We are proud to work together and along with some excellent stakeholders to protect the lives of young Ontarians.

The bill is supported by the Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco, which includes the following partners: the Canadian Cancer Society—and I'm happy to see that Mr. Andrew Noble is here with us in the gallery—the Ontario Lung Association, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, the Ontario Medical Association and the Non-Smokers' Rights Association.

Bill 124, when passed, will ban the sale of flavoured and individually sold cigarillos, which are clearly marked, to young Ontarians. Cigarillos are an issue many adults may be largely unaware of. Many of us have never seen cigarillos, so I would like to ask for unanimous consent to pass around some cigarillos to the members.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is there unanimous consent? I hear noes.

The honourable member has the floor.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Could you try it again?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Sorry, Mr. Speaker, there was a little bit of confusion. Could you ask for unanimous consent again so that I can show what it looks like?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Do we have unanimous consent for the honourable member to demonstrate whatever she's going to demonstrate? I hear a no.

Honourable member, you have the floor. Please carry on with the debate.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I'm sorry, we didn't have unanimous consent for a demonstration, so could you please just carry on with your debate?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We've asked twice. Perhaps someone else would like to try later, but I'd say to Madame Gélinas, please just carry on with your debate.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Cigarillos, as you can see—quickly, before they were taken away—come in all sorts of very bright colors. They don't look like anything scary. They smell like candy. They certainly do not smell like a tobacco product, and they are very appealing to young people. So while many people in this House may have seen a cigarillo, although briefly, for the first time today, let me tell you that youth know what cigarillos look like.

When it comes to cigarillos, we are not the target audience. The target audience is young Ontarians. Researchers refer to cigarillos as "starter cigarettes," because that is exactly what they are: They are a cigarette to get our kids to pick up smoking.

According to a University of Waterloo 2007 survey, 35% of grades 10 to 12 students have tried cigarillos. Those are kids who are 15 to 17 years old. A third of them have tried, have smoked cigarillos. Most of the people in this House had never seen them. The kids have seen them. The kids have used them. This has been evidenced as the sales of cigarillos have been skyrocketing in recent years. To put a number to that, in 2001 there were 50,000 units sold. Fast forward five years later, in 2006, we're now talking 80 million cigarillos sold. That's a lot of cigarillos.

According to an analysis done by Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada, young people are as likely to experiment with cigarillos as they are to experiment with cigarettes. They are three times as likely to try cigarillos as adults, and that includes young adults. So we know that these sharp increases in cigarillo sales are primarily due to young smokers' consumption of them.

Cigarillos are as addictive as cigarettes, because they contain the same amount, and often a larger amount, of nicotine. Like cigarettes, they increase the risk of cancer. Most people know that cigarette smoking and cigarillo smoking gives you lung cancer, but it also gives you cancer of the mouth, the throat, the larynx and the esophagus. None of those are fun diseases.

1350

The bill addresses the two main avenues by which cigarillos appeal to young people: packaging—the small size makes it a price they can afford—and flavouring. I will address both of those in my remarks.

I'll start with flavouring. It may be a surprise to most members of this House that cigarillos are sold in a variety of flavours. In the little corner store in Lively, where I live, there are 21 flavours of cigarillos. They include such things as candy, fruit, alcohol; flavours such as strawberry, chocolate, mint, peach, coconut, vanilla, rum, pina colada, and one of my favourites, appletini.

Mr. Mike Colle: How about cappuccino?

M^{me} France Gélinas: They have cappuccino also.

Cigarillos are packaged to look like candies, and they smell like candies.

Most parents who would see a cigarillo in their kid's school bag wouldn't flinch, wouldn't think twice. They look like they belong with kids' belongings. They look like a crayon, a lipstick or a lip gloss. They certainly do not look like a dangerous tobacco product.

The flavouring of those tobacco products makes their smell and taste appealing and makes them easier for first-time smokers to consume. That was the first marketing ploy.

The second one has to do with packaging. Cigarillos are wrapped in a very thin tobacco leaf, and it is for this reason that they are exempt from all of the regulations that apply to cigarettes. So, even though cigarillos contain a filter and kids call them mini-cigarettes, they have squeezed through a loophole in the legislation that intends to exempt cigars. They have used this loophole to introduce those cigarillos to our kids. That means that cigarillos can be sold individually. When they are sold individually, they don't come with any warning whatsoever, just the brightly coloured packaging that I was able to show for a few minutes.

The consequence of this individual sale should not be underestimated. In essence, it makes a life-threatening tobacco product an affordable purchase for every young person with limited financial means. What do I mean by this? A cigarillo can be bought for around a dollar. Lots of kids who are not smokers would never think of spending \$8 on a pack of cigarettes; they don't smoke. But they're willing to give out a dollar and get one of those fancy little cigarillos. They look cool, they smell good, they have no health warnings on them. How can they be bad? But they are.

We know that high taxes on cigarettes have been a major deterrent for cigarette consumption, especially for young people. But cigarillos pose an equal threat to the health of Ontarians, and a cost deterrent is essential.

With this bill, we will ensure that cigarillos are sold in packages of 20 or more. Just by increasing the mandatory package size, we are making them unaffordable to most youth and certainly not as attractive to first-time smokers. They will be sold for about the same price as a pack of cigarettes, and \$8 is quite a bit of money to spend if you're a non-smoker.

This move will also ensure that health warnings are mandatory for all cigarillo sales, as stipulated by the federal Tobacco Act. So the next time a parent happens to browse through their kid's backpack and sees a pack of cigarillos, they will know exactly what this product is. They will know that it is not candy, it is not crayons, it is not a lip gloss; it is a dangerous tobacco product.

The executive director of Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada, Cynthia Callard, said, "There's something dangerous on the market, and there's nobody watching how it is being used." Well, we are watching how it's being used. This is why Bill 124 is being introduced: to quickly address this growing health threat. We are taking the recommendations of health advocates throughout Canada to protect the health of young Ontarians, and we have the full support of the prominent organizations—organizations that promote the health of young Ontarians each and every day.

There has been support for some aspects of this bill by Imperial Tobacco of Canada. They are a tobacco manufacturer and they say they "share the same concerns of the bill sponsors that flavoured cigarillos may be attractive to underage smokers and as a result should be regulated in the same way as cigarettes"—this comes from Imperial Tobacco. Imperial Tobacco Canada supports a ban on flavoured cigarillos that appeal to youth and they support the mandatory packaging size of 20 or more.

I'm proud to have introduced this bill with my colleague from Brant and I hope that I can have the support of this House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Dave Levac: I want to thank the member from Nickel Belt first of all for her kind generosity when we were working on this problem in parallel. We got together in the respiratory caucus; all members of all parties in this particular caucus represent concern for smokers, and young smokers in particular, alike. I want to thank the member for her sharing of it. It was an offer made to the other party for the members of the respiratory caucus, who at this particular time did not want to join in on the discussion.

I will remind everybody that this is private members' time. These are ideas which all members are able to put on the table. Absolutely any government that has ever been elected in this province doesn't have a monopoly on ideas, so this evolution of what private members can do has continued, and the next evolution is to allow private members to co-sponsor, which I'm very proud to take part in.

We will hear, we could hear, we might hear somebody who's opposed to this bill. Let's talk to those people.

Here's what they may say. I want you do two things for me, and they are: Listen very carefully to what it is that they're objecting to. My suspicion is that they too will voice concern about a growing trend of using single cigarillos for sale with no health warnings at all. I think they'll understand that. I think they'll also agree that the manufacturers found a way to go around the bill that was protecting us from smoking. I think they'll understand that, and I think they'll understand that the growth of this product has gone since 2001 from 50,000 single units sold to 80 million sold in 2006—a marketer's dream. That guy, whoever came up with how to get more of those out the door, probably earned a bonus.

Let me talk about what's going on. Why the loophole? Because cigarettes use paper; cigarillos use tobacco. Because they use tobacco to wrap the cigarillo, they don't have to put on a health warning. They can sell it as a single entity. So what's the bill asking? It's very simple: Package them in 20s; sell them in 20s. Then we ask them, let's get the health warning on there so that kids can have that opportunity. The third thing we're asking in a simple way is, let's get rid of all the fancy flavours like chocolate, vanilla, strawberry—

Mr. Mike Colle: Cappuccino.

Mr. Dave Levac: Cappuccino—what's the other one, the drink?

Interjection: Pina colada.

Mr. Dave Levac: Pina colada. And guess what? It doesn't smell like a cigarette. What is the trick behind that? Well, here's the second trick. The second trick is this: For the parents who may be interested in not asking their kids to smoke, here's what happens: They can't smell the cigarillo, and it looks like—which somebody in this place wouldn't allow us to show you. You can't show the one packaging for it? Well, let me put it up and let you use your mind. This one is lip balm for young people, if you know what lip balm is, that beautiful little lip balm in packages. Guess what the cigarillo looks like in the packaging? Exactly like lip balm. So if it doesn't smell like a cigarette, it looks like lip balm, and mom happens to see it on the counter, what do you think it might be? A little bit of a marketing trick to play with mom and dad so that they actually don't open up the lipstick or they don't open up the cigarillo? Absolutely. The guy's going to get a bonus, a big bonus. Imagine if he gets two cents for every one of those 80 million that were sold. Bada bing bada boom, he hit the jackpot. Who did he hit the jackpot on? The lungs.

1400

I got a memo from somebody that said, "What about those alcoholic-flavoured things? They make alcohol taste good." I did a little research and we find that between four and eight deaths took place with alcohol poisoning. Between 13,000 and 16,000 people die every year from cigarettes. This is the next logical step in smoke-free Ontario. I think we should support the bill, simple as that. Let's listen to the opposition say we're being a nanny state, we're doing all kinds—you listen carefully to them and we'll figure out who's in whose

pocket. I'm in the pocket of making sure our kids are safe. I support the bill; I think it's a great bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I am happy to join in the debate today on An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act with respect to cigarillos, and I recognize the member from Nickel Belt and the member from Brant, who have brought this forward. As we've been shouting back and forth here, I'm going to share my time with my colleague from Thornhill and I'm sure you're all waiting for his comments.

There is no question that the protection and the safety of our vulnerable members of society, our children, are paramount—we all agree with that. As the critic for the Ministry of Health Promotion and being a health professional for over 20 years, I certainly can see the side effects of smoking—no question. There are aspects of Bill 124 that I certainly agree with, the principles of the legislation. I do agree with the fact that products should be clearly marked in the matter of the effects that can happen from smoking, so anything with packages should be for 20 and over, have that proper labelling. I know that during the recent federal election, the federal government announced a cracking down on cigarillos and tobacco products marketed to children. The flavouring and the packaging products, like the flavours mentioned, no question they should be banned. They are definitely targeting children as a market. To prohibit those flavours that would appeal to children, I can agree with that for sure.

We have to, of course, make sure we don't curtail the freedoms that adults have in respect to the flavouring, but there are certain loopholes in the Smoke-Free Ontario Act that have been brought up before in the Legislature. Cigarillos is one, and I know my colleague from Burlington brought up medicinal marijuana and the fact that that can be smoked in the presence of children. We tried to get that loophole closed. I'm happy that the Minister of Health Promotion is here because we've discussed many times in the Legislature what we say is the incredible underground market for cigarettes out there. Close to 50% of the cigarettes bought in Ontario are bought in the underground. That's going to be officially announced in a few days, that the lost revenue to the government is about \$500 million on that. We can't put our heads in the sand: Most of the people that are smoking illegal cigarettes are teens. The government is over there and is supportive of the bill, yet they do have tools in the toolbox that they can use and should be using. It is great the private member's bill is introduced this way, but the government could make some regulation changes in regard to cigarillos without this having to come to private members' bills.

The Canadian Convenience Stores Association has released some interesting statistics. They visited 80 high schools throughout Ontario, where they collected the cigarette butts—that's why it's called the butt study. They were all in the 40% of contraband. So the kids are getting their hands on this stuff. We've brought up many

times the illegal smoke shops in the vicinity of schools. We're giving money to stop smoking, and there's packaging with labels—not cigarillos at the moment, but we hope to—about the dangers of smoking, yet the government is ignoring this contraband market that's going on that's almost 50%. We cannot be responsible legislators and ignore that.

Mr. Bryans, from the convenience store association, says the solution is clear: We should be making it illegal for youth to possess tobacco. They can't buy it until they're 19, but it's not illegal for them to possess it. Whether they're getting it legally or someone is getting it for them, they're possessing it. We ban possession with alcohol, but we don't ban it with tobacco. If we're going to address this issue, let's address the whole situation. We can't ignore how much of the underground market goes on. Predominantly it's kids. They're not getting identified; they're going to the trunk of the car and getting the cigarette package out.

There are things that can be done with the bill that's before us today, in respect to the number of cigarillos in a package and the labelling. But really, more enforcement can be done by this government on the loopholes I just mentioned. I guess we'll see what they do with this bill and how they're going to enforce it or, I hope, put it to committee, if it gets that far, so we can make some changes.

I know my colleague from Thornhill is going to add to the comments on this bill, and we look forward to that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm happy to speak to this bill in support of my colleague from Nickel Belt and the member from Brant, in terms of what they have done together.

I have to say that I'm a lucky guy. I never liked smoking cigarettes. I find them most unpleasant. When I did try it, from time to time, I derived absolutely no pleasure from it. So I'm lucky. A whole lot of people who smoke are not so lucky. We all know that smoking is addictive—we all know that—and we all know that smoking kills. There's no magic to it; there's no mystery to it. If you smoke, you are more than likely going to die at some point. You may be a lucky George Burns type, who was able to smoke until he was 90—I think he was 90.

Mr. Dave Levac: A hundred and one.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: God bless, even longer. That's a rarity. That human being could be classified as almost divine, to be smoking for so long and not die at an earlier age. He's an exceptional guy, but there aren't too many George Burnses; there aren't.

So I say to you that whatever we can do to make sure we encourage young people not to smoke is a good thing in my book.

I have to admit that I do smoke cigars from time to time. I have to admit that.

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: You want me to tell you the truth. Again, no pleasure from cigarettes, but I did pick up the habit of smoking a cigar from time to time—you

too? But the thing is, I've got control. Most of you smokers don't, and that's the problem. Most of you smokers, whoever you are, don't have any control. If you're addicted, you're going to do it all the time. That's the difference between me and some of you who do smoke on a regular basis.

Rare is the man, like my father, who came to this country in 1956, who was a heavy smoker and a heavy drinker too—not too heavy, but heavy enough. He had to travel to the north at a time when jobs were scarce. the Diefenbaker years—and boy, do the Italian Canadians remember Diefenbaker. He had to travel from Toronto to the north to work. He travelled with a whole lot of guys. He was in this place where he was told that he couldn't smoke. They caught him smoking and they told him, "If we catch you again, we're going to send you back to Toronto." He stopped smoking cold that day.

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That's an amazing power. That power is an economic imperative. For an immigrant who came to this country and had to work, if he's told that he's going to be sent back to Toronto and cannot work, and work was difficult to find, it was easy to stop smoking—versus the addicted of today, where they say, "Oh, my God, it's so hard. I just can't," and you wear patches and go to so much psychotherapy to stop smoking; it's unbelievable, this middle-class phenomenon—and working-class phenomenon to boot. You can't stop these people from smoking. All it took my father was to be told he couldn't work and that was it. It ended.

There aren't too many human beings who can do that. The majority of you addicted people are in trouble and you all know it. At some point you're going to kick the bucket and you're going to kick the bucket early. So do I want to encourage young men and women not to smoke, all these kids in grade 3 and 4 up there? Yes, of course we want to stop them from smoking; of course we do.

The corporations understand how you lure the young child, the young kid, the young girl or boy to smoke. It's a beautiful thing: You flavour this little cigarillo. Again, there's no magic. They hire psychologists, yet, to find the ways to hook these young people to smoke. You flavour them with all these flavours that young kids like: strawberry, as was mentioned, to make it look like candy or fruit; chocolate; mint; peach; coconut; vanilla—it doesn't matter. You flavour it. Why? Because kids love flavours. A whole lot of adults, too, are still addicted by those things. But young kids, they just can't stop themselves. Young kids can drink stuff that is so sweet, seven times the degree that you or I can as adults. If you flavour it, they go to it like flies to you-know-what, and corporations know. That's why they hire the big boys, the ones they pay big bucks: to find ways to package it and, in this case, flavour it so that you hook that young kid to smoke these cigarillos. Eighty million cigarillos sold—that's a whole lot of cigarillos, and that number's going to grow.

Do I want to support my two colleagues here with this bill? Of course I do. Do I want to make sure this bill gets into committee? Of course I do, and quick, too.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: We don't even have to waste time. We could get the minister to stand up and introduce a bill and do it today; you're quite right. But let's not do that. Let's not. Let's go through the process.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Let it grow by itself. We'll send it to committee. We'll have long hearings, two, three or four weeks as we used to do when we were in government—if you want. You could, but you don't have to. Maybe a couple of days might do it. The Tories used to do a couple of days at a time; they thought it was good enough. You could do the same—couple of days, we're done.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Sometimes they didn't do any.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Sometimes they didn't do any hearings. God bless them, that's how expedient and efficacious they were. Why have hearings, for God's sake, when if you have the right idea, you just do it, no consultation required?

So do I want to put restrictions on these cigarillos as best as I can? Yes, I do. If you sell it in a package and it forces that young person to spend—if it's 20, it's \$20, I'm assuming, right?

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It could be cheaper? Okay. It's still expensive. The point is to prevent the young person from buying, to make it harder, if not impossible, for that young person to buy. I can't understand where they find this money to buy these things, but they do, I guess. If you flavour it, the green buck will do. So if you package it, make it harder and prevent that young kid from buying, that's fine by me. You put on the label saying, "This is harmful to you"—that's not good enough. It's okay, the label is fine, but I want to prevent the young person from starting to smoke in the first place rather than having to deal with a label that may or may not trigger a health risk for that child. If you prevent him or her from smoking, they're likely not to pick up the habit and they're likely not ever to be addicted. That's what we want to do. We want to save lives; I think it's paramount—the secondary effect of saving our health minister from having to spend billions of dollars in having to treat these people in hospitals, where they have to stay for a long, long time to be cured and/or helped and/or saved, because you can't save them, generally speaking; they die. We hold them for a long time, painfully, with a great deal of cost, but the greatest cost is the human life. That's what we should be thinking about: how we save those lives. For me it's a no-brainer; it's an easy thing to do. Let's get on with it, send it to committee, have a couple of days' hearings, make a bill out of this and save lives.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I rise today to speak on this very important bill. I share concerns with both the MPP for Nickel Belt and my colleague the MPP for Brant on

Bill 124. The McGuinty is crystal clear: Ontario's youth are a fundamental priority to this government. I am a mother of three children. I raised them to be healthy, active, non-smoking adults now. I have a firm sense of my responsibilities as a parent. Similarly, I feel just as strongly about my responsibility to Ontario's children as the Minister of Health Promotion. Accordingly, I addressed this specific issue by letter in July 2008 to then-federal Minister of Health Clement to regulate package sizes for cigarillos under the federal tobacco access regulations. In that same letter, I outlined my concern with the flavouring contained in cigarillos which increases the appeal of these products to youth.

I requested that the government amend the Tobacco Act to prohibit flavouring or aromas that are attractive to youth. Additionally, I requested that a review of the health warnings be expedited, given the recent evidence regarding the ineffectiveness of such warnings. I was pleased to hear the Prime Minister promise to implement tough new measures to address flavouring and package sizes for cigarillos and other tobacco products that may be targeted at young people. I also spoke with my counterparts about the issue during the last federal-provincial-territorial meeting in Quebec City this past September, including the current federal Minister of Health. I will continue to advocate the importance of this issue with my new federal counterpart to ensure that she is aware of our collective concerns and is doing all that is in her power to address them.

We have come a long way in the past four years. We established a province-wide law for smoke-free environments when the Smoke-Free Ontario Act became law on May 31, 2006. We surpassed our goal of reducing tobacco consumption by 20% by 2007. We have made it mandatory for anyone who appears to be under 25 years of age to present ID before purchasing tobacco. In 2008, we also banned the display of tobacco products, including cigarillos and chew tobacco, at convenience stores. Next January, legislation passed by this Legislature comes into effect which will protect children from second-hand smoke in motor vehicles.

I feel privileged to be part of a government that has done more than any previous Ontario government to address the harm caused by tobacco use. We share the concerns of this bill, and we believe this bill is a positive step in the right direction to saving lives. The more we discuss, the more we debate, the more we will raise awareness of the dangers of tobacco use and the more we will prevent more young people dying from the results of tobacco use.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Before I rip into this private member's bill, I want to first say that the members for Nickel Belt and Brant, who are co-sponsoring the bill, are, I am sure, as concerned as any of the rest of us for the health, safety and well-being of our youth. I recognize that.

It is an admirable sentiment, but I do not believe that their objective will be achieved by banning flavours and dictating the size of cigarillo packages. Legislation that governs the sale of tobacco—which is, by the way, still a legal product in Ontario in case any of you were wondering—and restricts its sale to those 19 and under is already in place in Ontario and enforced in this province.

Some statistics suggest that flavoured cigarillos, meanwhile, make up less than 0.5% of all tobacco sold in Canada. With that in mind, I don't see any significant or even insignificant preventive strides being made in stopping smoking amongst youth.

What information do these members possess that proves that flavours in cigarillos encourage youth to smoke? Are five-year-olds going to smoke because these things look like candy, and if so, where are the five-year-olds going to get them?

This bill is yet another chapter in the "McGuinty Liberals know best" saga brought to us by the "When in doubt, ban" philosophy, except this one has been manufactured for us jointly between the NDP and a Liberal member.

Where is the scientific evidence, the analysis or the research that are supposed to be the basis for the decisions that we in this House make? Do you know that nearly 50% of all Ontario tobacco sales are of contraband cigarettes, so you can't control them anyway; that 26% of cigarettes smoked by underage high school youth are contraband cigarettes? So there's no control. Will your bill protect youth from smoking those?

We all know that there are many things in this world that threaten the health, safety and well-being of our youth, but vanilla is not one of them. Repeat criminals in the streets are; economic instability, shaking us to our core, is; loss of jobs within families that cause worries at the kitchen table, that's a problem; strikes at universities that prevent kids from getting the education they've paid for—these are things that we can address.

The illegal tobacco sold indiscriminately to old and young in smoke shacks, circumventing laws on childhood smoking and depriving us of a billion dollars in lost revenue—we could address that. Instead, we're talking about cigarillos that are supposedly unavailable to the same kids you want to protect.

I can see how all those things pose a problem, but I can't for the life of me understand how raspberry cigarillos got on that list. Flavoured cigarillos sitting on a shelf behind the clerk who is charged with the responsibility of checking his or her customer's ID before any tobacco can be sold are not a danger to teenagers. The meth lab exploding next door to their house, ecstasy in their school or at a friend's party, those are dangerous.

This bill makes me wonder what the member from Nickel Belt was thinking. She contributes so well to this Legislature every day, and I had very high hopes that she was immune to the infatuation with bans that plagues all of you on the other side.

Instead of wasting this Legislature's time with this type of nanny-state legislation, I would encourage the

member to pressure the government to target those things that actually do threaten young people.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Private member's bill indeed. Why didn't the minister put it forward?

Her own party is speaking against the ridiculous notions put forward under Bill 126 on driving. This begs the question, do they just brainstorm on how they can further intrude into the everyday lives of Ontarians? You have to ask what's coming next? I know. Strawberry Smirnoff. Of course, the fact that Smirnoff is sold at government-owned LCBO stores may be enough of a protection.

My executive assistant gave me instructions here: "Keep the Liberals away from apple martinis." It's tongue-in-cheek, I know, but this is the kind of ground we're treading on.

So far, Liberals have been too busy trying to be the boss, parent and guardian to every man, woman and child in Ontario to do the job they were elected to do. Instead of a prosperous province, they aim to create a nanny state where the government will direct you on how you can save yourself from yourself.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Great government. At a time when the economy is in a shambles, when Ontarians are looking to their MPPs for solutions, Liberals and NDPers are taking up this Legislature's valuable time debating what? Flavoured cigarillos? Another ban? Kill me now, Mr. Speaker. At this point, after five years of the McGuinty Liberal government, according to that caucus, the free citizens of the province should not be able to do what? Get a tan, own a pit bull, buy a vanilla cigarillo, hang their clothes on a clothesline, get rid of weeds on their lawns, eat good-tasting French fries, and in case I decide to buy an illegal handgun, I am certain that this government's ban on carrying it in my car will be the deciding deterrent.

I have prepared my own list of bans which I believe are just as essential and necessary as those already proposed by the members on the other side of the House. So let's ban the following: bread crumbs in bed, staying out during the work week because we know that's for our own good, wearing white after Labour Day, makeup before the age of 16, black nail polish for males and electric Jell-O. Let's ban overdone steaks and let's put an end to crappy wine.

At the end what we want and what the people of Ontario want is for the members in this House to stop pretending that they know best, stop wasting our time with meaningless bills and start paying attention to the real issues of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you for permitting me to speak on such an important issue. Before I start, I first want to congratulate the members for Brant and Nickel Belt for bringing such an important issue to this House. It's a great indication about the function of this place.

When we have an idea, we can share and introduce it together in order to put a lot of emphasis on many different issues.

I was listening to the debate going on in this place. I personally have lots of experience from when I was in the retail business, selling cigarettes, tobacco and cigars. I never saw those cigarillos until lately, because I think they're new to the market. They've not been on the market for a long time.

I think it's important to educate our young people about the danger of smoking. I think we've done so in this House on many different occasions, by banning cigarettes in public places and many different initiatives. I agree with the member. We should label the cigarettes and package them in a bigger number to eliminate the number of those who smoke in the province of Ontario.

But most importantly, I was listening to the member from Thornhill speaking about contraband tobacco. I think it went up from 24% to 49% now being sold in the market everywhere across the province of Ontario. Those are dangerous. When people come with a bag full of cigarettes, they can charge only \$10 for 1,000 cigarettes, versus \$70 or \$80. This is the danger.

Sadly, if those people get caught in the parking lot, guess what? The enforcement officer cannot stop them. It is not his or her jurisdiction to stop and investigate this issue, because this belongs to the police. By the time you invite the police to come, the people will disappear. If they get caught, the only punishment is that they lose whatever they have in tobacco.

So we have different problems across the province of Ontario. The one I think is most important to mention on a regular basis is education, how we educate our kids and the public about the danger of smoking. It's important to say that if you drink, the possibility of dying is very slim, but if you smoke, the possibility is huge and big, as the member from Brant mentioned. Also, the member from Nickel Belt mentioned it many different times. As she is an expert in the health field, she knows better than some of us in this place, I would say—we do have a lot of health experts here.

I think it's important to pass this bill. It's at least a great indication of our concern as elected officials.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? The honourable member from Nickel Belt, you have the remaining time for the NDP, plus your two-minute response.

M^{me} France Gélinas: If it's okay with you, I will let the co-sponsor of the bill do the last two minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Certainly.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'd like to thank the members from London-Fanshawe, Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, Thornhill, and certainly the co-sponsors of the bill—the member from Brant and the Minister of Health Promotion—for participating in this debate.

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Mr. Rosario Marchese: Me too.

M^{me} France Gélinas: And least but not last is my good friend from Trinity-Spadina. I was saving you for dessert. You ruined it.

I wanted to mention to this House the reason why this bill, although it is very simple, is very important. It is important because when you ask adult smokers—people who are addicted, people who are trying to quit smoking, people who have picked up the habit and are dependent on nicotine—when they started smoking, 80% of them started smoking before their 18th birthday. They did it when they were young. We look at this product, and it is targeted to kids by its packaging; it's targeted to kids by its pricing; it's targeted to kids by its flavouring. The reason for that is because if you want to develop smokers who will buy cigarettes for the rest of their lives, you have to hook them early. If you get them in their teens, get them with products like cigarillos, you have them for a lifetime, because ending an addiction to nicotine is so difficult to do. This is why this bill is important.

I'm a bit of a dreamer, and I can see a day when there won't be 44 people a day dying because they smoke. Every year, 16,000 Ontarians die because they are smokers. This is \$3.75 billion directly treating the health consequences of the smokers in Ontario. Most of them die prematurely.

This bill is very simple: Get rid of flavouring; get rid of individual packages—package them in groups of 20 or more and put the labels on. This bill has one aim: to prevent kids from picking up smoking, to protect kids' health so that we can have a healthier Ontario. We want to prevent kids from picking up the habit. We want to prevent kids from becoming smokers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? The honourable member for Brant has two minutes.

Mr. Dave Levac: I would acknowledge the members who participated in the debate today: my colleagues from London—Fanshawe, the Minister of Health Promotion, Trinity—Spadina, Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, and Thornhill and the Minister of Health Promotion.

I want to also thank the researchers and staff from both of our offices who worked co-operatively in pulling together the concept and made us even more aware of some of the things that were going on, that even I didn't know, with regard to the depths that people have gone in order to catch our young people.

In my earlier statement, did I not tell you that someone would stand up and start professing as to why we cannot do this? I also told you—and I've said this since 1999—that this is private members' time; this is the time to take the shackles off of party politics. But nay, we have members who still don't get it. This is the good place, this is the positive place, where great ideas can get discussed, can get put forward and can even get improved in committee.

Yes, indeed, this bill needs some improvement. There are some things that both the member and I have agreed we want to deal with that will make it a sharper, more precise bill about cigarillos.

I personally am going to let, and I'm sure my colleague will agree with this, the third party groups who have been e-mailing us since the press conference this

morning, thanking us profusely for keeping kids' health in their prime focus—I'm going to let the cancer society, I'm going to let the lung association, I'm going to let the—look, you know who they are. They're going to come out gangbusters, and I'm going to let them read Hansard and watch the tapes and I'll let them talk to the member from Thornhill—because I will say this: It's suspiciously like the lobby from the cigar pack that said the same things as he's saying. Isn't that interesting?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): This ballot item will be dealt with in 100 minutes.

Before we move to the next order of the day, pursuant to standing order 38(a), the following matter will be debated on Tuesday, December 2, 2008, at 6 p.m., notice having been given by the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka of his dissatisfaction with the response to an oral question asked today to the Minister of Health and Long-term Care.

LAKE SUPERIOR DAY

JOUR DU LAC SUPÉRIEUR

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the third Sunday in July be established as Lake Superior Day, to acknowledge and celebrate the lake's importance in enhancing the quality of our lives.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, Mr. Brown, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I am delighted to have the opportunity to bring this issue before my friends here in the Legislature. I want to first of all thank Howard Whent, who is now the mayor of the town of Wawa and who brought this issue to my attention, oh, some years ago—before he was the mayor.

He's been an active member of a group, the Lake Superior Binational Forum, which consists of 24 volunteers—from municipalities, academia, First Nations, and tribal groups in the United States—who understand the importance of Lake Superior as a treasure. Howard has worked very hard to see that this group receives the recognition it needs.

Now, this group and this resolution, importantly, I think, have the support and the proclamation of the state of Michigan, the Governor of Wisconsin, and the Governor of Minnesota. Ontario, being the Canadian jurisdiction to the north on the lake, has not done this. So I thought it was important that we bring this to the attention of members and that we work together with our friends on the American side of the border to make sure that we as Ontarians and Canadians recognize the importance of this lake.

I represent Algoma—Manitoulin as you would know, and Algoma—Manitoulin—I haven't exactly canvassed all jurisdictions in the world—probably has more shoreline on fresh water than any constituency anywhere. I represent the entire North Shore of Lake Huron, Manitoulin Island, Killarney on the east side of Georgian Bay,

and about half of the Canadian coastline of Lake Superior. So it is an enormous amount of land that borders on the Great Lakes.

Lake Superior, just so that members know, is the largest body of fresh water in the world by surface area. It's approximately 563 kilometres long, it is 257 kilometres in width, its average depth is 147 metres, and its maximum depth is 406 metres. That's about four football fields deep. The volume of water in Lake Superior is 12,100 cubic kilometres. About 10% of all the fresh water in the world is held in Lake Superior.

About halfway across is the city of Sault Ste. Marie, which is represented by my friend Mr. Oraziotti from Sault Ste. Marie, but as we go north and west, we're back into my constituency. We start in Prince at Gros Cap and go up the coast through Goulais and Haviland shores and Harmony Beach. We come to the beautiful bay of Batchawana, which many of you would know. We continue on. As we go up, we come to the Montreal River. I don't know if any of you have made this drive, but it is truly spectacular. The highway at Montreal River shows one of the steepest inclines in Ontario. If you're a truck driver, it's not a place that you are most fond of. But the scenery is absolutely magnificent.

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We then come to what I would consider to be one of the crown jewels of provincial parks, Lake Superior Provincial Park, which is approximately—it follows the highway for about 100 kilometres, or the highway runs through it for about 100 kilometres. That's the Trans-Canada Highway, Highway 17, as you would know. It boasts some scenery that is absolutely next to none in the world. We have people from all over Europe who will come through the constituency, and they will point out that even the mountainous areas in Europe and the fine scenery I'm sure they all boast about are just not quite as superior as this scenery in this part of Lake Superior.

Going through the park, we come—the Minister of Natural Resources is here and I'm sure she's absolutely most proud of our parks system and Lake Superior park in particular—to the Agawa area. Agawa has an information site, one of the interpretive sites built by the province of Ontario. I want to tell the minister, what you need to do is talk to the folks in your ministry. There needs to be a bigger sign for this interpretive centre. There's a relatively small sign, but it points to a centre that is absolutely magnificent.

It shows, for example, when you go in there—and all members should encourage not only themselves but their constituents to go there—the Great Lakes in a way that I don't think I have ever seen. It has demonstrations that show, for example, that Lake Superior has more water in it than all the other Great Lakes combined. If you took all the other Great Lakes, took all their water, added Lake Erie three times, then you would have the same amount of water that's in Lake Superior. So I would encourage the minister to do something about her signage so that people who are travelling up the coast would recognize that.

We then come to the community of Wawa, which is about 10 or 12 kilometres north of the park, which as most people would know is the community with the great goose out front at the information centre. It's a magnificent community that boasts all the amenities; it boasts numerous hotels, fine restaurants. Lake Wawa is right there. It boasts many things, but it also boasts a large freshwater dock. One of the things that Lake Superior does not have is a lot of commercial docking places along the coast which, of course, are necessary for both our economy and for our safety on the Great Lakes. If you need to put in somewhere, if you have a relatively large vessel, at Michipicoten Harbour you can do that. It's the site of the former Algoma ore dock. There's not another dock—Sault Ste. Marie in the south would be one, but to the west, you'd have to go all the way to Marathon before you would find one.

Following the highway, you come to White River. White River is a community not quite on Lake Superior but is, as all of you would know, the hometown of Winnie the Pooh.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: My friend the member for Essex knew that.

It's the hometown of Winnie. An army officer stopped and purchased a bear at the CP station in White River and took that bear to England during the First World War as the regiment's mascot. He then went on to Europe with the regiment left the bear at the London Zoo while the regiment was fighting in France. That's where A.A. Milne saw the bear, and his son Robin came to know the bear as Winnie the Pooh, hence the famous stories. There's a very nice replica of Winnie there.

Anyway, as you continue, you go into the constituency of my friend the Minister of Northern Development, at the Hemlo goldfields. You then follow that through places like Marathon, Terrace Bay, Schreiber, Rosport and Nipigon—again, absolutely magnificent scenery. You come to Thunder Bay, with the Sleeping Giant. You can then go down to the American border and follow the lake around.

I myself have had the privilege of driving the circle tour of the lake. It is astounding on both the Canadian and American sides. Both have magnificent parks. We, in Canada, have the first marine conservation area ever proclaimed under federal legislation. It was proclaimed in 2006 and includes most of the western part of Lake Superior. It is home to more than 70 species of fish. Gulls, herons, eagles and pelicans feed in those waters, while some also use inland islands for habitat. There are as many as 50 shipwrecks in the area. Jacques Cousteau characterized this as an absolutely beautiful place to do your work, if you are in those kinds of pursuits.

We have done much to preserve this area. We are working with our American state legislators and the American government to make sure the lake is kept pristine and safe—it's necessary for the betterment of all, not just Ontarians or even people in North America.

This is a huge treasure that we value for its commerce. In the early days, Étienne Brûlé came in 1618, as mem-

bers would recall, and marvelled at this inland sea that you could not see either shore from when you're in the middle. Mariners have known this for many years. They have known of the fog and the danger of this lake, which is one of the coldest in the world. We in our area want to continue to promote the commercial value of the lake and also the pristine—it is a pristine and valuable resource. Most of you would not know, but most of the land there—almost all of it, as a matter of fact—is in public hands today. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I appreciate the opportunity to talk about Lake Superior—part of the Great Lakes—and also to highlight the natural beauty of this resource. I guess that having a specified day is one way to acknowledge and celebrate this particular lake's importance. But I do think back. I spent some time as parliamentary assistant for natural resources under Mike Harris. At that time we were involved in what I consider a much grander initiative than we're seeing here. I'm referring to the Great Lakes Heritage Coast. Much of that focused on the Lake Superior shoreline. The Speaker may recall that it was part of Ontario's Living Legacy.

When I came on board, Ontario's Living Legacy was the highest priority for the Ministry of Natural Resources. People from all corners of this great province came together for those round table discussions, those consultations resulting in a plan to establish 378 new parks and protected areas that totalled six million acres, the largest single expansion of parks anywhere. At the time, I know it was said that Mike Harris created more provincial parks and protected areas than all the other Premiers put together, if you go back to Confederation—and, again, we know that this Legislative Assembly predates Confederation by another 100 years or so.

1450

A key part of the original Living Legacy plan included nine signature sites—there are now 10 signature sites; in his last week of reign, Mike Harris identified the St. Williams crown lands in my area as signature site number 10—with exceptional natural features that warranted that kind of special attention, that promotion that we just heard in the presentation this afternoon. One of the 10 focused on Lake Superior down through the North Channel, eventually encompassing much of the Manitoulin shoreline right down to the Severn River in Georgian Bay.

We're very proud of our Great Lakes heritage. There is little doubt that the Great Lakes Heritage Coast is an awfully special stretch of shoreline, a spectacular sweep of shoreline. The original designation was 2,900 kilometres, starting at Pigeon River up on the Minnesota border, sweeping right down to the Severn River at Georgian Bay. There were changes during the process: Manitoulin was included, as well as St. Joseph Island and the Cockburn Island shore, bringing it up to a stretch of well over 4,000 kilometres. Again, it would come in from the shoreline for a total area of 1.46 million hectares. I

won't do the math, but if you multiply that by 2.2, you'll get the number of acres.

So we're discussing today something that's part and parcel of what I consider the previous vision to not only protect, but to promote a very unique and impressive area. We think of that Lake Superior shoreline and the lake itself, and oftentimes we take a land-based perspective. We also have to take a water-based perspective. It's a wilderness lake, an area of very sparse development and spectacular landscapes and abundant wildlife populations, with very little in the way of tourism infrastructure.

Having travelled that shoreline for many, many miles, especially when working on that particular project, and through many, many communities, I would stop in to corner stores and restaurants and gas stations, and they all knew about the Great Lakes Heritage Coast; they all knew about the potential for tourism and the myriad of possibilities to promote not only tourism, but tourism associated with related aboriginal culture, the scenery, trails, fishing, hunting, and boating.

Superior was the centerpiece of that heritage coast signature site, a centerpiece of Ontario's Living Legacy, that land-use strategy which encompassed 45% of the land area of the province of Ontario and much of the Precambrian Shield.

Through that consultation process, people laid out for us at the time a number of long-term goals.

(1) Protect the scenic beauty and the natural ecosystems.

(2) Promote the potential for recreation and tourism, and build on the other economic benefits from existing parks, for example, and protected areas.

(3) Ensure that development is compatible with the overall plan.

(4) Foster co-operation, education and public information, working with municipalities and aboriginal communities.

This was done and was being done by the Ministry of Natural Resources, as I recall. There was a director and at least four staff dedicated full time to this project. Again, the goal was to build on the resource-based economy of northern Ontario and continue to diversify not only tourism but the area economy, so the economic benefits to getting, really, a partnership or a co-operation with all the other initiatives and get all the government ministries—I think of MTO, for example—to be part of this process.

Further work was obviously identified at the time to further implement the concept. I regret that, in the last five years, I've seen very little evidence of a continuation of the project. It was a project that commenced back in the year 2000. It was launched by John Snobelen on January 27, 2000. Ted Chudleigh was parliamentary assistant at the time. They coined the phrase—with respect to the Superior shore and the rest of the coast heading south and heading southeast, they used the theme, "Imagine the possibilities." Again, it was meant to encourage people to come forward with their ideas to promote the coast and, at the same time, protect the coast.

The goal was to translate a lot of those very exciting ideas into some meaningful benefits. Further consultation occurred. I was involved. Ted Chudleigh, member for Halton, was involved in meetings; I think he was involved in something like 22 community meetings. Another 100 submissions came in and, again, the operative approach was not to ram anything through, far from it; not to go forward with any preconceived ideas. It was to continue to have an ongoing process as the feedback continued to come in.

Many other projects were initiated at the same time. Much of my focus went north as well, to work with people at Lake Nipigon, the Nipigon Basin, again yet another one of those 10 signature sites. I also had an opportunity to do some work at Kawartha Highlands with the Kawartha Highlands Signature Site.

The end result? We know the plans and what came forward as far as interpretive centres: plans for Killbear, Killarney, the provincial parks, the Voyageur Heritage Centre earmarked and set up at the French River Provincial Park. My assistant Rob was just up there this summer. So, part and parcel of Ontario's Living Legacy, the Great Lakes Heritage Coast was successful as far as it went. It has been held back a bit in the last several years and I continue to look to this government to pick up the torch.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm going to be extremely brief and say the following: The truths of this resolution, as revealed by the member from Algoma-Manitoulin, are so self-evident that I have very little to add except to say I support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I was hardly prepared to get up so quickly because my friend from Trinity-Spadina usually waxes on eloquently, as we say. But I'm really proud and pleased today to stand with my good friend and colleague, the member from Algoma-Manitoulin, and talk about his resolution that the third Sunday in July be established as Lake Superior Day.

Now, you might ask, so what? What's so special about Lake Superior that you would want a day each year to be recognized as Lake Superior Day? Well, I think my colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin has given us very good reason to answer that indeed it should be.

1500

He also, when he was speaking, mentioned Mayor Howard Whent of the municipality of Wawa. I want to read from a proclamation signed by Mayor Whent and the municipality of Wawa that goes to explain further what Lake Superior means to those residents who live there, who live on the lake, who live by the lake, about why it could mean so much to us as Ontarians, even those of us in the very southwest. This proclamation said, "Water is life and the quality of water determines the quality of life.... Lake Superior supports tourism, industrial, recreational, commercial, tribal and cultural activities for its residents and visitors;

"And whereas the responsibility for protecting and restoring the quality of Lake Superior's waters, land, and wildlife lies with all residents, municipalities, businesses, tribes, visitors and others who enjoy its natural beauty and resources and benefit from the lake"—and they went on to declare a day in June this past year as Lake Superior Day.

Interjection.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Excuse me. It was July; they proclaimed it in June.

Therein lies some more reason why I think that we should all recognize Lake Superior for its grandeur, and a good reason to declare a day in its name.

Also, you might say, "Well, here's this guy from the southwest"—I'm proud to live on one of the other Great Lakes, that being Lake Erie. In fact, the great riding of Essex is surrounded by water. We have Lake Erie on the south, the Detroit River, a heritage river, on the east, and Lake St. Clair. Although not one of the Great Lakes, Lake St. Clair in itself is a great muskie ground, so it's to be recognized as well. I live on one of the Great Lakes, and I can understand then why my colleague, on behalf of his constituents and those in the north, would want this recognition.

I think it bears repeating, but the member for Algoma-Manitoulin mentioned some statistics that give you some idea of the vastness of this lake. The lake covers 51,000 square kilometres. It's the size of South Carolina. The lake is so big that it could hold all the water from the other Great Lakes, as has been mentioned, plus three more lakes the size of Lake Erie. Now that doesn't belittle Lake Erie at all; it just means that Lake Superior will hold a vast amount of water. That water eventually makes its way down to Lake Erie. We in the southwest can recognize it for that.

Lake Superior's deepest point is 2,143 metres. That's hard to imagine. You think more of an ocean that would be that deep. Again, to make a comparison to Lake Erie, we have a lake that runs, at its deepest point, maybe 20 metres. You get some idea—60 feet as opposed to 1,300-and-some-feet deep—how deep Lake Superior is. In fact, we have a ferry that runs across Lake Erie called the Jiimaan, and we kind of kid that there's no danger of being lost if the Jiimaan sinks because her freeboard and the top deck are higher than the lake is deep, so you could just simply stand on the top deck and wait to be rescued.

I just want to conclude by encouraging all of us to encourage our residents and constituents in the southern part of Ontario that if you have never visited the northern part of this province, and in particular the shores of Lake Superior, then you have an experience coming that is second to none. It's a vast, beautiful area. The lake is cold and deep and its resources are great. I think that for those, among other reasons, we should all support my colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin in recognizing the third Sunday in July as Lake Superior Day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: I believe I have a minute and a half left of our time to speak briefly to this resolution to make the third Sunday in July to be established as Lake Superior Day. The member from Algoma-Manitoulin suggested that you take a drive up Lake Superior, and I would say that's good advice. In fact, he's given me some ideas for summer holiday plans now.

The first time I drove up the coast from Sault Ste. Marie north up Highway 17 I was doing a loop around, getting northern input. It was April, which isn't exactly the most beautiful time of year, but I found myself stopping every couple of miles to take pictures, looking over Batchawana Bay along the coastline of Lake Superior. It is truly one of the wonders of the world and absolutely spectacular.

One of the other times I got the opportunity: I went to the 100th anniversary of the signing of the James Bay Treaty 9. I took the opportunity to fly up to Pickle Lake via Thunder Bay in the north in my little sea plane, except that it was 36 degrees, and Lake Superior was a lot cooler, so I actually didn't see the lake on that trip because there was a big fog bank. It is certainly one of the wonders of our province, as was pointed out by the member for Haldimand-Norfolk, and the work that was done on Ontario's Living Legacy by the member from Halton. There has been a lot of work done. The member made reference to some of the visitors' centres that have been created under that program.

I certainly look forward to supporting this resolution today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ça me fait extrêmement plaisir de parler sur la motion au sujet du lac Supérieur. Les résidents de mon comté sont chanceux d'être à une distance en voiture très raisonnable du lac Supérieur. Vraiment, ce lac est un joyau. Pour ceux qui ne l'ont jamais vu, je vous encourage à vous y rendre. C'est magnifique. Peu importe où on se rend dans le nord de l'Ontario, si vous pouvez voir le lac Supérieur, vous allez être impressionné.

Il y a des parties du lac qui sont très froides. Quand on arrive dans le bout de Thunder Bay, c'est assez difficile le faire de la baignade, mais plus au sud on peut certainement se baigner, faire de la voile—on peut en profiter de bien des façons. La pêche dans le lac Supérieur est une aventure en elle-même. J'ai moi-même eu la chance d'aller pêcher. La pêche au saumon, près de mon comté dans le lac Supérieur, est excellente. C'est une pêche qui est très excitante, et habituellement on remplit le bateau et on remplit notre quota assez vite.

Le lac Supérieur fait partie du nord de l'Ontario. Tout le monde qui le côtoie et qui connaît le lac en est fier, moi incluse. Je félicite certainement le membre pour avoir apporté cette proposition en l'honneur du lac Supérieur. C'est quelque chose que le parti néo-démocratique appuie, et nous allons certainement voter en faveur de cette motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Merci. Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak on the motion of my good friend and colleague the member from Algoma-Manitoulin, who has certainly served this House with a great deal of distinction and integrity from 1987. It's interesting: When you think about Lake Superior, there's the famous song that was immortalized by Gordon Lightfoot. The song was about the wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald. It was the famous iron ore carrier on Lake Superior that experienced one of those horrendous storms. It was an ore carrier, fully loaded, and it became one of Mr. Lightfoot's signature songs. It often gets requested. He doesn't have as active a tour as he used to have many years ago, but it is a song that always gets requested from Mr. Lightfoot.

1510

It's interesting, of course, that the member represents part of a riding that was held by a former Prime Minister, Mr. Pearson, who represented Algoma East from about 1949 to 1968. One of the reasons Mr. Pearson thought that Canada needed a new flag was the opportunity he had to be in the area around Lake Superior, where he could indeed appreciate the vastness of the lake, the resources of the lake and just the sheer beauty of that lake—one of the reasons he thought so instinctively that Canada needed a new flag to represent some of the great assets we have throughout this great land, but for Mr. Pearson, being a native of the province, particularly Ontario. For me, coming from the riding of Peterborough, we're surrounded by the Great Lakes. The Peterborough lift lock has national historical recognition. I share with the member for Algoma-Manitoulin the vision that we need to celebrate the great natural resources this province has to offer.

My first experience with Lake Superior was the opportunity to be on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs—I think I was riding on the same plane as the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka. When you start the approach to land at the airport in Thunder Bay, you get to appreciate the sheer size and magnitude of Lake Superior. It's almost like an ocean, when you're peering out of the small porthole of an airplane. You really appreciate what it has to offer. At other times, it was the centre for the grain terminals in Thunder Bay. It has a rich history as part of the major transportation corridor not only here in Ontario but throughout Canada.

I think the member certainly deserves recognition for moving forward a resolution that we sit back on the third Sunday in July and really appreciate what Lake Superior has to offer. With those remarks, I know that all sides of the House this afternoon will be supporting this resolution for my good friend the member from Algoma-Manitoulin.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Seeing none, the member from Algoma-Manitoulin has the remaining time, in addition to his two-minute wrap-up.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I truly appreciate the comments of the members from Haldimand-Norfolk,

Trinity–Spadina, Essex, Parry Sound–Muskoka, Nickel Belt and Peterborough.

Lake Superior is truly a worldwide resource. It's a resource that we need to treasure, protect, promote and use for the benefit not just of Canadians or Americans, but of all the citizens of the world. It is truly that kind of place.

I was interested in the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka's comments about Alona Bay, some of Old Woman Bay and some of the other wonderful places along the route on the part of the shoreline that lies in Algoma–Manitoulin. It is truly awesome.

It is a treasure that needs to be promoted. In this time when we know that tourism is a difficult industry to be in, when it is important for us to recognize what attributes this province has, I would put Lake Superior right at the top of provincial attractions of worldwide significance. We need to encourage the municipal leaders, the leaders of the First Nations and the leaders of the American states that border the lake to promote the circle tour, promote the clean, safe waters of the lake, and promote the commercial advantages it presents to us all.

Lake Superior started with a recognition of its great importance by the earliest people there, the First Nations people—truly an inland sea, truly a place that was treasured by those First Nations folks. There are photographs. There are examples of First Nations settlements that predate recorded history. It is an amazing place. It is a place that we who know it well want to share with the rest of the world.

I am encouraged by what I consider to be the tone of this place this afternoon, as all members appear to be wanting to support our communities and our leaders in our area to promote Lake Superior Day, the third Sunday in July, and I look forward to working with those leaders in those communities to promote this even further.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Of course, we'll vote on this ballot item in about 50 minutes' time. Orders of the day.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
AMENDMENT ACT, 2008
LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES ÉVALUATIONS
ENVIRONNEMENTALES

Mr. Balkissoon moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 123, An Act to amend the Environmental Assessment Act / Projet de loi 123, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les évaluations environnementales.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Balkissoon, pursuant to standing order 98, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I introduced Bill 123 because it's intended to clarify the application criteria under the Environmental Assessment Act as it relates to municipalities. This bill will amend the Environmental Assessment Act by adding the following:

"Restriction on municipal proponents

"5.0.1(1) If a regional municipality, lower-tier municipality, municipality, county or township is a proponent of an undertaking, it is entitled to apply to the minister for approval to proceed with the undertaking only if the proposed terms of reference governing the preparation of the environmental assessment, and the environmental assessment itself, relate to lands situated wholly within its boundaries." And I will repeat, "relate to lands situated wholly within its boundaries," because this is an important part of this new subsection.

There is an exception that I'm moving in subsection 5.0.1(2):

"Exception

"(2) If a regional municipality, lower-tier municipality, municipality, county or township is a proponent of an undertaking, it is entitled, despite subsection (1), to apply to the minister jointly with one or more such municipal proponents if the proposed terms of reference governing the preparation of the environmental assessment, and the environmental assessment itself, relate to lands situated only within the boundaries of those municipal proponents."

Just to clarify that, where something crosses boundaries, we would need all municipalities to co-operate.

Subsection 5.0.1.(3) is:

"No review by minister

"(3) The minister shall not review an application made under subsection (1) or (2) unless the condition set out in the relevant subsection is satisfied."

This bill, if approved, will change the way municipalities submit applications under the Environmental Assessment Act in the future. An application by a municipal council for an individual environmental assessment will be for an undertaking only within its own boundaries and jurisdiction. An application for an undertaking by one or two municipal jurisdictions would require a joint or a co-proponent application for that undertaking under the Environmental Assessment Act.

This change would be a major improvement and it would require early discussions and agreement between municipalities for all cross-jurisdictional undertakings prior to the filing of an application for an environmental assessment approval.

In the future, this early discussion and agreement would avoid confrontation between municipalities and, in some cases, save huge expenditures of municipal tax dollars. It would also significantly improve the citizens' engagement process and avoid major confrontations because there would be co-operation and preliminary support by the municipal councils involved long before the public is engaged.

Bill 123's intent is to amend the act and provide more defined criteria for municipal applications.

I would like to highlight key parts of two subsections of the current Environmental Assessment Act:

"Approval for undertaking

"5.(1) Every proponent who wishes to proceed with an undertaking shall apply to the minister for approval to do so...."

“‘Proponent’ means a person who,

“(a) carries out or proposes to carry out an undertaking, or

“(b) is the owner or person having charge, management or control of an undertaking.”

It further goes on to state that “person” includes a municipality.

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Section 9(1):

“Decision by minister.

“9(1) The minister may decide an application and, with the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council or of such ministers of the crown as the Lieutenant Governor in Council may designate, the minister may,

“(a) give approval to proceed with the undertaking;

“(b) give approval to proceed with the undertaking subject to such conditions as the minister considers necessary to carry out the purpose of this act and in particular requiring or specifying ...

“(iv) such changes in the undertaking as the minister considers necessary,

“(v) that the proponent enter into one or more agreements related to the undertaking with any person with respect to such matters as the minister considers necessary.”

The minister can also refuse to give approval to proceed with the undertaking.

The basis of the minister’s decision in the act says that:

“(2) The minister shall consider the following matters when deciding an application:

“1. The purpose of the act....

“3. The environmental assessment....

“7. Such other matters as the Minister considers relevant to the application.”

It is also general opinion that the minister may reject an undertaking if he or she believes the undertaking does not have the potential or appropriate resources to be started and completed in a reasonable time frame.

Based on clause 5(1) in the current Environmental Assessment Act, one would conclude that a proponent must have significant authority—that is, ownership, charge, management, or control of the undertaking resources—to complete the proposed undertaking as per clause 5(1)(b) before the Ministry of the Environment would consider acceptance of an application and the accompanying terms of reference under the current Environmental Assessment Act.

Unfortunately, I have to introduce Bill 123 because this is not what happened with an environmental assessment application filed in 2002 for an arterial roadway known formerly as the Markham bypass and now renamed as Don Cousens Parkway in the region of York, town of Markham, a proposal which sought to have a direct link to Highway 401 travelling through the city of Toronto. This application did not have the city of Toronto as a co-proponent or a joint applicant.

I would like to provide some details on this York region application, which is the compelling factor for me introducing this bill.

The York region application clearly had not met the requirements of section 5(1) of the current Environmental Assessment Act. As per 5(1)(b), it says the applicant must be “the owner or person having charge, management or control of an undertaking.” Clearly, the region of York was not the owner of lands, and would not control or manage the undertaking of the construction of the section of the arterial road, within the boundaries of Toronto.

In 2002, when the application was submitted, region of York legal staff should have known their proposal did not comply with the true spirit of the Environmental Assessment Act. In 2002, the Ministry of the Environment overlooked or failed to identify that this application did not meet the criteria specified in section 5(1) of the environmental act.

As per clause 9(1) of the act, the application should have been rejected, or the terms of reference of the individual environmental assessment modified by the minister to require an agreement to proceed from the city of Toronto before the undertaking of the environmental assessment work itself.

The region of York was allowed to proceed with an expensive process to complete this environmental assessment work, that is still ongoing today, six years after the application was filed. All of this work was done at a tremendous cost to the property taxpayer, in the millions, and to this date, to the benefit of none other than paid consultants.

The city of Toronto monitored and provided comments repeatedly during the environmental assessment process, consuming its property tax dollars, furthering its own position on behalf of the citizens of Toronto against the actions of the region of York.

Toronto citizens themselves consume a lot of their personal energy and personal cost, participating in every step of the environmental process. Property tax dollars in the millions could have been saved if due process was followed, proper review was done and the environmental act was clear.

Since 2005, as the provincial representative of a large residential community that would have been negatively impacted by this undertaking, a large amount of my time and my office budget has been spent unnecessarily addressing misinformation and propaganda being sent out by interested parties on both sides of this proposal about the provincial government’s process, its involvement and the minister’s impending actions.

This situation can certainly repeat itself anywhere in the province where growth and development is occurring and cross-jurisdiction infrastructure projects become a necessity. The York region application is still alive and is now proceeding to spend additional funds to assess the city of Toronto’s concerns and its recommended options. This is six years after the filing of an application. This is not good for the province, it’s not good for the municipality, and it’s not good for the citizens who had to bear with this process.

I believe that this bill will not only clarify legislation, but it will clarify the process for municipalities and also

help to conserve scarce municipal tax dollars, and it would provide for a less controversial citizen participation.

I would not like to see the repeat of this situation, nor would I like to see taxpayers' money wasted in the future. I hope every member of this assembly will support this amendment to the Environmental Assessment Act.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 123—an easy number to remember; I guess that's the luck of the draw—the Environmental Assessment Amendment Act. As we've heard, this proposed legislation is a bit of an attempt by a member from Scarborough to clear up some of the rules around environmental assessment approvals for those projects, as mentioned, that cross jurisdictional boundaries, and cross into other municipalities. We've also heard this afternoon that the current Environmental Assessment Act does seem to have somewhat of a hole in it and that it fails to provide clear rules as to what the proper process is for a municipality to follow, if a project is to move forward through an EA process, but it does cross into a neighbouring municipality's jurisdiction.

On the surface, it looks like a good thing: It looks like it would cut some of this wrangling and some of the red tape, it would cut some of the wasted money that was mentioned and help prevent or alleviate some of these inter-jurisdictional arguments that we hear about.

I've got a field in front of my house. If I were to work cash crop, if I were to put cattle in there or to run horses, I would have to build a fence, an electric fence. I probably wouldn't have to check with my neighbour. But if I were to start putting in wooden posts and pounding in steel posts, I would talk to my neighbour. That would be a line fence. I would be subject to the Line Fences Act. Over many, many years, through community consultation—both my uncles were fence viewers—the process was set up so that neighbours, adjoining neighbours, have a say and reach agreement.

So, you know, we can imagine the myriad of potential problems that can arise when you have a project based in one area, that crosses into another, like a road, for example, and the difficulty in moving it forward by the proponent or the proponent municipality.

I understand through Bill 123, the member here from Scarborough was hoping to avoid situations like the one that occurred with respect to the Markham bypass. Those from that area would better be aware or understand: I guess that's something like close to a 30-year tale whereby York region spent a lot of money, a lot of time, a lot of effort in attempting to cross an EA hurdle in their bypass, only to be stuck in some kind of limbo due to lack of support from Toronto.

1530

That said, I must admit that when I first saw the title of the bill, the Environmental Assessment Amendment Act, I saw it as an attempt by this government and a government member to begin to address some of the con-

cerns very recently raised by Gord Miller, our Environmental Commissioner, in his recently released report this fall. In that report, Environmental Commissioner Miller refers to the broken assessment process: "The province has increasingly stepped away from some key EA decision-making responsibilities, and the Ministry of the Environment ... is not adequately meeting its vital procedural oversight role. As a result, the EA process retains little credibility with those members of the public who have had to tangle with its complexities." The Environmental Commissioner of Ontario indicates that he's "contacted regularly by individuals and groups" that are "frustrated," and they're frustrated by similar "EA misadventures" as we hear about today. "It would not be too forceful to say that Ontario's EA process is broken. This ought to concern not only academics and environmentalists, but also the business community, the development-oriented ministries and everyday Ontarians hoping to see their province move forward on a sustainable path. We have lost the old vision for EA; a new vision is urgently needed." Whether this is part and parcel of a new vision for the Environmental Assessment Act, legislation that goes back 32 years, the vision "that more informed, more transparent planning processes can lead to the betterment of the people of Ontario, and the protection, conservation and wise management of the environment. How far have we come towards realizing that vision? The EAA has, over time, suffered so many truncations and add-ons that it no longer bears much resemblance to its original, idealistic self. Many idealistic pieces of legislation become encrusted and their intent diluted with compromising amendments."

I'm not suggesting this amendment would compromise the process. "But," as Gord Miller goes on to say, "if we want to avert poor decisions, we should recall the original purpose of the EAA—'the betterment of the people of the whole or any part of Ontario'—and we should share a desire to get the EA process right."

So while I agree with some of the intentions of Bill 123, I do worry that by discussing this afternoon the possibility of merely adding an amendment to what has been identified as an overall broken process, it's a little bit like putting a Band-Aid on the knee of a person with a concussion or blowing up a balloon full of holes or, to use the oft-quoted expression, rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. It may solve one aspect of what ails the collective problem, the collective issue, but it doesn't address the problem as a whole. In the end, it doesn't matter how many Band-Aids you put on or how many chairs you move; if you don't change the course, you're left with, if I put these analogies all together, a pounding headache holding an empty balloon on a sinking ship.

So this is a step forward. Whether this is going to right the ship and refloat the ship—I don't know whether Gord Miller would feel that it's enough. As he put it, as I mentioned, the EA system is "broken." It no longer does what it was designed to do and perhaps no small number of amendments will address the wholesale change that he is calling for to right this listless process or, if I go back

to the Titanic, this listing process, perhaps about to submerge after 22 years.

Just to quote some more from the Environmental Commissioner's report: "Ontario's environmental assessment process is supposed to serve as a safety net to protect the public and the environment from harm by requiring agencies to consider the environmental implications of proposed projects before they're allowed to proceed." Again, we have a situation where the EA process is intended to ensure that new projects are environmentally sound. Sometimes we get sidestepped or sidebarred or bushwhacked, and we get into these jurisdictional arguments that may not be arguments based on environmental reasons; it may be for other reasons. As Mr. Miller points out, there are flaws in the EA process. I think we all recognize that in debating this particular private member's bill today. Because of these flaws, some projects are not carefully screened, not as carefully screened as the public would expect, and the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario believes that Ontarians should be worried that the environment and public health are being jeopardized by this broken process.

So on the surface, the intent of the bill at face value is well-meaning, but it does lead to a number of questions. To start with, do we really need legislation to codify that age-old tradition of asking your neighbour before you put up that line fence? I may answer that because there is legislation, the Line Fences Act. It was codified in law even though it is seen as common sense, and I'm sure there were a number of gun battles and cattle let loose over the years as a result of one rancher or one farmer not talking to his neighbour.

If we don't do it or if we do it, what are some of the consequences if we got to the application stage? As well, how does this bill affect future developments? I think of talk of the transit link between Union Station and the airport—was that called Blue22? I'm not involved in some of these projects—and the Big Pipe project, which covers a number of municipal jurisdictions. Last night I was in Peter Shurman's neighbourhood, and there was a spirited discussion advocating the extension of the TTC further north. How many municipal jurisdictions do we cross to achieve that goal?

So I applaud the goals of the amendment. I like the idea of saving ratepayers' dollars. I don't know to what extent this would lead into the program of this interventionist government, the Big Brother role that we see in this government. To what extent we need more amendments and more laws to better protect people or municipalities from themselves, I don't know.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

1540

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I will be supporting the bill introduced by the member from Scarborough–Rouge River. His bill speaks to a need to change the Environmental Assessment Act, and it speaks to larger problems that the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario spoke of. I want to draw on his wisdom, his hard work, his

attachment to the issue and the intelligence that he applies to environmental concerns. He says on page 28 of his report the following:

"Environmental Assessment: A Vision Lost

"Environmental assessment (EA) is one of those grey, blurry areas of modern bureaucratic practice: often misunderstood, sometimes misused, but mostly ignored by the average citizen. Yet environmental assessment has a crucial role to play in our lives; it should be society's pre-eminent tool to carry out far-sighted planning for public infrastructure in the name of the public good. Unfortunately, Ontario has been long burdened with an EA system where the hard questions are not being asked, and the most important decisions aren't being made—or at least are not being made in a transparent, integrated way. The province has increasingly stepped away from some key EA decision-making responsibilities, and the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) is not adequately meeting its vital procedural oversight role. As a result, the EA process retains little credibility with those members of the public who have had to tangle with its complexities."

He speaks harshly about how we are respecting the principles of the Environmental Assessment Act, and he speaks a bit critically of your government, the member from Scarborough–Rouge River. I think we need to pay attention to these things, because he speaks in part to your bill.

He also says, on page 32, "Although the EAA was conceived to address province-wide plans and programs, as well as site-specific projects, only one province-wide plan has ever been taken to the EA hearing stage." That was in 1992-93, when we were in government.

Most other decisions on projects are done by piecemeal, which I know the member from Scarborough–Rouge River understands very clearly, because that's what his bill speaks to and that's what most environmental assessments around most projects are about.

To give an example, the York Durham sewer system, known as the Big Pipe, was split up into 14 projects. Each one was approved separately, despite the fact that the project had massive regional impacts on water aquifers, for example, and was very unlikely to have been approved as a whole. Splitting a project prevents the proper assessment of regional environmental impacts; splitting a project prevents proper public input; and splitting a project leads to long and drawn-out battles between jurisdictions and their citizens, as environmental assessments move ahead without agreements of all local and/or regional governments involved. That is why Mr. Balkissoon is bringing forward this bill, in large part: to avoid long, costly and publicly divisive battles, such as the one that has taken place in his riding over the Markham bypass.

York region and the town of Markham have long wanted to build an express road to join Highway 407 and Highway 401. The problem is that Toronto has long opposed this road due to legitimate concerns about environmental impacts to the sensitive Rouge River Valley

and social impacts on residential areas in Scarborough. The dispute has gone on for years, incurring significant costs in terms of lawyer and consultant fees. That is what this member has spoken to, and that is why he brought forward this bill. But it speaks to the larger problems of the Environmental Assessment Act and whether these problems will be solved.

Again, the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario speaks to these problems and says the following on page 38:

“There are simply too many critical and persistent points of failure. The latest overhauls do not resolve a number of fundamental and intertwined flaws:

—“Important, overarching decisions on policies and programs are not being made under the EAA;

—“No” is rarely an option, because projects are almost never rejected under the [environmental assessment] process;

—“Decisions are being made in a piecemeal fashion;

—“Proponents are being allowed to apply for and obtain other approvals prior to [the environmental assessment] approval;

—“The need for projects and undertakings are often shielded from scrutiny.”

Remember, this is the Environmental Commissioner speaking:

—“Important back-end technical details are also shielded from scrutiny;

—“The quality of [environmental assessment] studies is ‘uneven’;

—“The statutory principle of ‘betterment’ is being neglected;

—“There is poor integration between [environmental assessment] and the land-use planning process;

—“Consultation processes have been discredited; and

—“The monitoring, compliance and enforcement of [environmental assessment] terms and conditions has been weak.”

He speaks to these problems in a way that suggests to us that unless we take this seriously, it doesn't matter what we say or do, the problems will continue.

A panel was established in 2005 by this government. While the government or the ministry has accepted some, it did not accept many of the recommendations by this panel that the Environmental Commissioner makes mention of. They are the following: “The ministry's plans do not appear to include a renewed use of hearings, a provincial EA advisory body, a green project facilitator, a fee structure, new procedures to deal with bump-up requests or project elevation requests, or a mechanism that allows for public comments through the registry on EA-related permits and approvals. There also appears to be little enthusiasm to strengthening the effectiveness of monitoring and reporting, or to developing compliance programs and procedures.”

I wanted to mention these things because we hire these people to give us the best advice. These are our watchdogs, and if we do not implement much of what they say—it's a wonder that we hire these people to do these

jobs if we then do not follow the recommendations they make. Why do we hire them? Why do we hire them to create such long studies and recommendations, and in the end, only take but a few of the recommendations and dismiss the rest?

So I wanted to tell you that the Environmental Assessment Act needs to be reviewed, and reviewed strongly, on the basis of what the Environmental Commissioner has said. It speaks to some of the elements that the member from Scarborough—Rouge River has brought before us today, and it is for that reason that I support his bill.

But I hope some of the members have the courage to review the recommendations made by the Environmental Commissioner and take them seriously so that we can improve the planet as we go.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It gives me great pleasure to speak on Bill 123 from my good friend from Scarborough—Rouge River. The member took a lot of time to explain, in his introductory remarks, what the bill is supposed to do in a very technical way in which most legislation is written.

As I look across the aisle at my good friend the Minister of Natural Resources, she would say that sometimes we should use Canadian Tire language. I fully understand what the member is trying to do. It makes a lot of sense, and maybe in my remarks in the few minutes I have here, I'm going to try to use some of that Canadian Tire language.

1550

As you know, I spent about 12 years in the municipal sector and my last stint as mayor of the municipality of Brighton. I guess I'm trying to relate this to the bigger picture that the member talks about. Normally, it's not uncommon for a small rural municipality that, on a Sunday afternoon, one of your neighbours or somebody who needed something done would come and visit you for a coffee. In many cases, they would come and see me and talk about a rezoning or a bylaw change that they needed for whatever reason, and in many cases it was for a good reason. The first question I would ask—you know it probably makes sense. You know that part of the process is to have public meetings and have input from your neighbours. I'd go, “What do your neighbours have to say? Because it's common sense that if we have this public meeting and the majority of your neighbours oppose it, chances are council will try to do the right thing, but they also have to listen to all the people who elected them.” In many cases they'd say, “Oh, well, I thought I would just come to you and you good folks would give me a blessing or deal with the issue.” A lot of them didn't understand the possibilities. And it was so nice, when we on council had to deal with a bylaw or rezoning application or to make those decisions, when we had no letters opposing what was in front of us or a delegation of 50 people in the audience that put themselves on the docket to speak.

What my good friend is trying to do here, in the bigger scale, is to tell municipalities across jurisdictions, “Let's

get all of these things out of the way and off to the side, so when we make an application, there might have to be some adjustments," that they might agree upon themselves, but it would make the process a lot smoother. What that does, when I hear the member use an example that's been on the books since 2002—I would like to guess, because I didn't happen to hear the number from the member, what this is costing. What's it costing the municipality? Well, municipalities are the ratepayers. It's not the mayors or councils or those folks; it's us that are footing the bill.

This almost makes too much sense. I know he spoke about the technicality of it but I think sometimes we need to really look at how this impacts on everyday lives. This would expedite the process. It would definitely be a lot less expensive, which, in today's economic situation, would be very, very helpful. So I'm delighted you brought this forward, something that maybe was missed somewhere. Hopefully we can move this forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm more than pleased to rise in support of my colleague's Bill 123. As was identified, sometimes we put in language such technical words that interpretation is left up to the individual, and so any time you can find a way and a process to clarify that which makes it cleaner in terms of understanding, I'm all for it, and especially when it comes to the Environmental Assessment Act, because it is a very complicated act. It is very challenging for people to understand. However, in this case, because it was the ministry itself, I'm obviously disturbed to think they had gone ahead, allowing a proponent to move onto someone else's land to actually do an assessment. But having said that, that was done and this is to ensure that this doesn't happen again.

We're going to be doing some very significant work with intermodal transportation. No municipality stands on its own anymore. People travel from one to another; they work in one, they live in another. They actually don't know, nor do they care, that there are borders. It's typically politicians who care that there are borders. People want seamless transportation. They want seamless work going on among all of those different municipalities that are involved. To think, in this day and age, that we're not picking up the phone to talk to that neighbouring municipality or jurisdiction about the challenges that are facing our community and what we'd like to do to address them simply doesn't make any sense. At the end of the day there's one taxpayer for all of Ontario. The money comes from the people of Ontario and we have a responsibility to do due diligence when it comes to spending that money and to ensure that it's spent in the most appropriate way. So I'm very supportive of any opportunity to put clarity to a piece of legislation or regulation around that legislation that requires it.

I'm also pleased because it will really force the municipalities to talk to their neighbours, as was discussed. I

can remember going to different jurisdictions, and they'd have a wonderful map on the wall of their particular region or municipality, and there was nothing above it, nothing below it and nothing on either side. Well, that certainly isn't the way the world is. We now know that we need to work together more co-operatively, that we need to find a balance in how we approach our challenges around transportation or of any number of other—I was just thinking of bridges or culverts, where they cross municipal boundaries. It just makes sense to work together. If there is an opportunity to define clarity, and I think my colleague has brought this forward, then I'm more than pleased to be able to support it.

I guess the other thing I'd like to identify is the number of years this has taken: six years. I hate to think of the amount of money that has been expended by a proponent who has neither the authority on the land nor the capacity to build on that land. I find that unconscionable, quite frankly, not only as a member from the city of Toronto, but just as a member of this House.

I would not presume to go to my colleague's house and do an assessment to put a walkway through his yard from my house to his house. How can that happen? It can't happen. I'm a little astounded that it is occurring and still going on. Having said that, what Bill 123 does is actually define a process to clarify this regulation and ensure that this cannot happen again, and encourage the kind of co-operation that should and must occur among municipalities and regions. I thank the member for bringing it forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Before I start, I want to congratulate my colleague the member from Scarborough—Rouge River for bringing such an important issue to this House. I know he served in a municipal government for the last, I don't know, 17 years, and has a lot of expertise in this field. He knows the issue very well.

When he gave me a note to understand the subject, it was very difficult to read, very technical. There were a lot of technicalities. I couldn't understand it. I went back to him and said, "My friend, can you explain what you want to achieve with this bill?" He explained it to me, and what he explained made a lot of sense—it's very simple. As my seatmate mentioned, it's Canadian Tire language; it was very simple.

Many municipalities and communities across the province of Ontario try to get an environmental assessment of a piece of land—maybe it's a garbage dump or whatever—that has been abandoned for many years. They assume they can take possession of that land, convert it overnight and use it, and then they bring the community and consultants together and start working on it and spend tons of money. In the end, they submit an application to the Ministry of the Environment. They know they have no jurisdiction or no authority to do what they've been doing for many years, and it costs them tons of money. I think it's very important to save taxpayers'

money, especially when you bring communities together and get their hopes up. In the end, they wait year after year.

As he mentioned, the city of Toronto has been working on a piece of land for the last six years. They spent a ton of money on it and haven't achieved anything yet. So it's important to bring clarity to the bill—he outlined very, very eloquently his position on the clarity issues—in order to clarify to the municipalities, whether they are small municipalities or large municipalities, what they can do and what their responsibility is, and their ability to bring change to their municipalities with a piece of land or environmental assessment.

Also, it was interesting to listen to the member from Trinity-Spadina talking about the commission. The report was commissioned by the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario. He brought these issues forward and pointed out the importance of clarifying many different issues in this regard.

Also, it's important—I was listening to the Minister of Natural Resources talking about the rules and legislation that we bring into this House on a regular basis that are written in a fashion that is sometimes very difficult to read and understand. Most of those rules and regulations or articles under legislation are open to many different interpretations. What happens with this issue is that many municipalities think they can do a lot of things and they bring, as I mentioned, the community together and promise them a solution to their problem. They get them together, bring their hopes up and then, after many years, many times and spending tons of money, they fail to do it. So it's very important to design and define the ability and also define the responsibility of the Minister of the Environment. In this way, we don't waste the time of the Minister of Environment and we also don't waste the time of the people or the municipalities. We also don't waste the money. Then we know exactly what we're doing; we know our jurisdiction and our capacity.

I want to congratulate the member from Scarborough-Rouge River for bringing up such an important issue. I want to thank him for his thinking and also bringing his expertise to us. I hope all the members of the House will support him.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Scarborough-Rouge River, Mr. Balkissoon, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I want to thank the member from Haldimand-Norfolk, the member from Trinity-Spadina, my colleague from Northumberland-Quinte West, the member from Etobicoke Centre, the former Minister of the Environment, and my friend from London-Fanshawe.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: How many friends do you have?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Lots. In over 20 years you make a lot of them.

The member from Haldimand-Norfolk made a good point. He said, "Should we make laws for those things

that we assume should take place?" He drew a reference to the Line Fences Act and said that we had to do it because people were doing the things we assumed would work. This is a case in point with the York region situation, where it didn't happen. I think the ministry assumed that certain things would take place and that's why they allowed application to proceed. It did not take place and we wasted taxpayers' money, and my bill is intended to clarify some of those situations.

I want to say thank you to the members for all their comments in support of the bill, because the bill does encourage co-operation between municipalities in the future. The most important thing is that it will save hard-earned taxpayers' money. If I can achieve that, it's all about that.

Last but not least, it will avoid confrontation with the citizens in our communities. That is very important to me, because I believe I was sent here to do some of that work, and that's what I'm trying to do here. I want to say thank you to the Minister of the Environment, because I raised this bill with him a couple of months ago and he is very supportive. I'm hoping he will incorporate it into the review of the Environmental Assessment Act or that he will let this go through and be put into law someday. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): That concludes our ballot items for today. But the time under our standing orders, from the beginning of when we started private members' public business to the end—so there's some certainty about when the vote will occur—that is required to elapse is two and a half hours, and that doesn't occur until 4:15, so this House stands suspended until 4:15. That's the standing orders.

The House suspended proceedings from 1603 to 1615.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time for private members' public business has now expired. Please take your seats.

SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO AMENDMENT ACT (CIGARILLOS), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI FAVORISANT UN ONTARIO SANS FUMÉE (CIGARILLOS)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Madame Gélinas has moved second reading of Bill 124, An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act with respect to cigarillos. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

I heard a "no."

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will call in the members after we deal with the next two ballot items.

LAKE SUPERIOR DAY JOUR DU LAC SUPÉRIEUR

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Brown has moved private member's resolution number 60. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.
Motion agreed to.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AMENDMENT ACT, 2008 LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES ÉVALUATIONS ENVIRONNEMENTALES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item number 60.

Mr. Balkissoon has moved second reading of Bill 123, An Act to amend the Environmental Assessment Act. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'd like the bill to be referred to the Standing Committee on General Government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on General Government? Agreed. So ordered.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1617 to 1622.

SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO AMENDMENT ACT (CIGARILLOS), 2008 LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI FAVORISANT UN ONTARIO SANS FUMÉE (CIGARILLOS)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Madame Gélinas has moved second reading of Bill 124, An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act with respect to cigarillos. I would ask all those in favour of the motion to rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Gélinas, France	Pendergast, Leeanna
Balkissoon, Bas	Jaczek, Helena	Phillips, Gerry
Best, Margaret	Kormos, Peter	Qaadri, Shafiq
Brown, Michael A.	Kular, Kuldip	Ramal, Khalil
Brownell, Jim	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Rinaldi, Lou
Bryant, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Ruprecht, Tony
Dansfield, Donna H.	Levac, Dave	Scott, Laurie
Dolle, Mike	Mangat, Amrit	Sergio, Mario
Drozier, Bruce	Marchese, Rosario	Takhar, Harinder S.
Lynn, Kevin Daniel	Martiniuk, Gerry	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Donseca, Peter	Moridi, Reza	

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arrett, Toby	Miller, Norm
Lees, Frank	Shurman, Peter

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 32; the nays are 4.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Madame Gélinas?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to refer the bill to the general government committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to the general government committee? Agreed? So ordered.

ROYAL ASSENT SANCTION ROYALE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I beg to inform the House that, in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to certain bills in his office.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The following are the titles of the bills to which His Honour did assent:

Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act / Projet de loi 50, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société de protection des animaux de l'Ontario.

Bill 85, An Act to permit the issuance of photo cards to residents of Ontario and to make complementary amendments to the Highway Traffic Act / Projet de loi 85, Loi permettant la délivrance de cartes-photo aux résidents de l'Ontario et apportant des modifications complémentaires au Code de la route.

Bill 97, An Act to increase access to qualified health professionals for all Ontarians by amending the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 97, Loi visant à accroître l'accès des Ontariennes et des Ontariens aux professionnels de la santé qualifiés en modifiant la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées.

Bill 114, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters, to amend the Ottawa Congress Centre Act and to enact the Ontario Capital Growth Corporation Act, 2008 / Projet de loi 114, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions, modifiant la Loi sur le Centre des congrès d'Ottawa et édictant la Loi de 2008 sur la Société ontarienne de financement de la croissance.

Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 119, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This House stands adjourned until next Monday, December 1, at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1627.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Brotan, Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
		Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture
		Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiles et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
		Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
		Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
		Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby—Oshawa	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora—Rainy River	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington	
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Première session, 39^e législature

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Monday 1 December 2008

Lundi 1^{er} décembre 2008



Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 1 December 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 1^{er} décembre 2008

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a Sikh prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I'm pleased to welcome those shortly arriving students and faculty from Walter E. Harris and would ask all members to join me in welcoming them when they arrive.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'd like to recognize the following guests: Lynne Boldt, Doug Carew, Marilyn and Ron Raw, Faye McGee, all from Victoria county, and Roman Sarachman and Stan Haworth from Flamborough. They are here to observe the proceedings today.

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I would like to introduce the family of page Tess McGurn and would like my colleagues to join me in welcoming Karen, Stephen and Michaela from my community of Barrie.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to acknowledge a good friend of mine, Diana Reynolds, who is in the east members' gallery, visiting from the great riding of Kitchener-Waterloo.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Health.

Hon. David Caplan: Today is World AIDS Day, and I'd like to seek unanimous consent that all members can wear the red ribbon to commemorate this solemn occasion around the world.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

On behalf of page Kush Thaker, we'd like to welcome his dad, Rohit Thaker, who's sitting in the public gallery today.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to welcome an all-party delegation from the Scottish Parliament, who are observing us here at Queen's Park, and as well, using it as an opportunity to meet with members on a wide variety of issues in the Speaker's gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park and Ontario.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Premier, and it deals with economic challenges facing the

province. In the past few months, as he knows, we've seen the financial markets sinking. I saw in the weekend papers that average house prices in Toronto have decreased approximately \$44,000 over the past little while. Economic predictions are getting gloomier, jobs disappearing—we saw a number of plant closure announcements last week.

Eastern Ontario, Premier: That's an area that you represent and one of the hardest-hit regions in the province. Last March, to great fanfare, you announced an \$80-million eastern Ontario development fund. Nine months later, we're not aware of one dollar flowing.

Despite the urgent need for economic stimulus, why has none of that money flowed to bring jobs and investments to eastern Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that the conversation of late has turned to efforts that should be made by governments around the world to stimulate their economies. That's an important conversation for us to have and I'm proud to report that we have been all over that for quite some time now.

We have in place now a five-year, \$30-billion infrastructure plan. It was going to end next year, but we've actually moved forward so quickly on that it's going to end one year early. I can tell you, for example, there are now, under construction, projects at 19 different hospitals in Ontario; I could list those for you, but I won't at this point in time. There's a Roy McMurtry Youth Centre—there's construction taking place there. The Durham Consolidated Courthouse is another example of infrastructure spending on our part. So there's a lot of work taking place and a lot of people working as a result of those jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I asked the Premier a specific question about a region that he supposedly represents. I guess he's spending too much time in eastern Ontario—

Interjection: Downtown Toronto.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Or in Toronto, I should say, rather than eastern Ontario, because we didn't get any response to that. It's been nine months and people in eastern Ontario are entitled to say "Show me the money"; nothing has flowed. Last year, during an election campaign, the people of Cornwall were guaranteed that Liqui-Force, the sewer renovation company, was coming to town—563 good-paying jobs. Your member there made that commitment during an all-candidates debate. More than a year later, again, that's another commitment that hasn't been met.

The people of eastern Ontario, Premier, need to know if you're going to deliver on the promises you've made. Why should they have to wait for some reannouncement next March?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Among those hospital projects which I referenced we can include the Kingston General Hospital, the Montfort Hospital—we'll remember that one; it has a very colourful history because that was a hospital that the Conservatives tried to close—the Ottawa Hospital regional cancer program; I think that's construction that's taking place at two different sites there.

With respect to the eastern Ontario development fund, a program which was voted against by my Conservative colleagues, I can report that we received 20 applications; 12 applications are currently in the 45-day assessment review. I can tell you we take our responsibilities seriously to conduct due diligence on each application, and we'll be working to complete this within the 45-day service guarantee period.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Well, I guess it really displays and shows the lack of urgency on the part of this government: Nine months after the announcement, not one dollar has flowed. You can look across this government in terms of a whole range of programs they have announced with great fanfare which are not working. The Next Generation of Jobs Fund: We heard last week that money is not going to flow until February. In terms of Second Career, I was advised this past Friday that one of the things that you've instituted there is going from a two-page application process to an over-40-page application process.

You're great at creating bureaucracies and making these wonderful announcements but having a real challenge in making the money flow, getting these programs to work and helping create jobs in this province. When are you actually going to do something about the jobs crisis and the economic challenges facing this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I will take the opportunity to speak a bit more broadly about some of the things we've been doing to stimulate the economy. In addition to—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Take your time, Dalton.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Thank you; I appreciate that.

We have a Next Generation of Jobs Fund; it's \$1.15 billion. There is no federal counterpart to that. We have our advanced manufacturing investment strategy; that's a \$500-million fund. There is no federal counterpart to that. We have in place extensive investments in energy projects. I talked about our hospitals. There's also extensive ongoing investment in transportation projects. In addition to our five-year, \$30-billion infrastructure plan, on top of that there is a \$17.5-billion Move Ontario 2020 plan which is focused on public transit projects here in the GTA and beyond. I am not sure if any government anywhere in North America is doing more, on a per capita basis, to stimulate the economy by way of infrastructure.

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HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is to the Premier. In April this year, you promised the people of this province that you would not cut public services, yet day after day, we hear that hospitals must fire nurses, close beds and eliminate services because the 2.1% funding increase you are providing for next year will not enable them to balance their budgets when expenses such as heat, hydro and salaries are increasing by 4% to 5%. Premier, why have you broken your promise to the people of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this issue as well. I think it's really important to understand that every single year, we have invested still more money into health care for the benefit of all Ontario families. We'll continue to do that on a go-forward basis as well. What I have indicated is that we may not be able to spend as much as quickly as we have in the past, given our economic circumstances, but everybody will be getting more money in health care.

Let me talk just briefly about some of the things that we've been able to do: I think it's 630,000 Ontarians who didn't have a doctor before now have one. We've hired thousands more nurses as well, to ensure that we can deliver still better quality public health care to all Ontario families.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: The reality is that there are still about a million Ontarians without a family doctor, and as you know, you postponed the hiring of the 9,000 nurses. I met with the president of RNAO today, who tells me that all of the nurses who are being fired at the hospitals have to now be added to that total of 9,000, so we are lacking more than the 9,000 nurses.

But I say to you today, Premier, that Cambridge cut 30 jobs, reducing access to surgery and diagnostic imaging services; Cornwall closed critical care units and one of their two emergency rooms; Rouge Valley, 220 jobs; Hamilton Health Sciences, 485 jobs. Why are you cutting services to patients at a time when the population is growing, getting older, and desperately in need?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. David Caplan: The member opposite mentions Cambridge Memorial Hospital. Over the past number of years, they've seen an \$11-million increase to the base of their hospital funding. That's a 16% increase in funding to this present day, and that is going to continue into next year, which is quite a different story than when the member opposite had the privilege to serve the people of Ontario as Minister of Health.

Should the member opposite and her colleagues get their way and cut \$3 billion out of health care through the elimination of the Ontario health premium, I shudder to think what would happen to Cambridge, Cornwall and St. Mary's or a host of other health—that's why we have an innovative \$1.1-billion aging at home fund, to drive

services into the community, close to where people live, and support seniors living at home. It's not, as the member would indicate—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: The Minister of Health doesn't know about what he speaks, regrettably. We've still seen no plan of action from this government, despite the fact that they promised, when the LHINs were created, they would come out with a vision, a plan. So we see all these cuts happening in the absence of any planning for a continuum of care for patients in the province of Ontario.

Premier, this is what you said: "The important thing in all of this is that patients are paying the price." That's what you said about hospital deficits. "What this means is that staff are being laid off, those who are left behind are burned out, beds are being cut, services are being reduced."

Premier, you said this on October 14, 1998. Then you said, on April 28 of the same year, "I'll tell you what I would do if I was in charge.... I'd "stop the hospital cuts."

Well, Premier, I ask you today: When are you going to stop the hospital cuts of nurses, beds and services, impacting negatively the health of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. David Caplan: I would say directly to the member, that's exactly what we did in 2003. That's exactly what the plan was: to stop the reckless cuts of the previous government.

The member mentioned Cambridge Memorial Hospital earlier. When the member and her colleagues came into power, the funding to Cambridge Memorial Hospital was cut by 5.5%. When the member opposite and her colleagues came to office, St. Mary's General Hospital was cut over \$4 million, or 10%; Grand River health centre in nearby Kitchener-Waterloo, cut \$4.7 million, or 4.33%.

That era and those days are over. We are not cutting hospitals. Rather, we are supporting them today in ways that we have not done previously. We are also driving services into the community through innovative mechanisms, like aging at home, which provides seniors and their family members with a range of supports—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Premier. Last week, the Premier gave us the McGuinty government's bold response to the continuing economic downturn. The Premier said that people should get out there and go shopping.

When it comes to an economic plan, is this the best the Premier and the McGuinty government can do?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I knew the moment I said that, that the leader of the NDP was going to seize upon

this and try to have some fun with it. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this as well.

About 60% of our economy in Ontario is based on consumer spending. The advice that I had for Ontarians—and I know that many folks are wondering how they can be part of the solution. My advice is this: If you can afford it—and that's the important condition I attach to this—you should go out there and buy those Christmas gifts. You should buy that fridge, you should buy that car, because that in and of itself is a small part, but an important part, of something that we can do together to help strengthen our economy. I know that my friend understands that as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: What I think the Premier needs to understand is that there are hundreds of thousands of Ontarians who no longer have a job. There are many more who have been told, "You take a pay cut if you want to keep your job." All of the economic reports show that poverty—people struggling to pay the rent, pay the hydro bill, put food on the table—that list, is growing too. So for the Premier to say, "Oh, the answer is just get out there and go shopping," ignores the social and economic reality of literally millions of families across this province.

I ask the question again. I know the Premier took this page out of George Bush's book, but is this the best policy advice the McGuinty government has to offer in the midst of what may be one of the worst economic downturns in seven decades: "Go shopping"?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Actually, I think it was on Tuesday or Wednesday of last week that President-elect Obama offered the same advice to Americans.

Again, I attach an important condition to that: if you can afford it. We're all getting so much bad news today that even for Ontarians with secure jobs, jobs that are not in danger of being lost, there's a natural tendency to kind of retrench and pull back, and that can have the effect of reinforcing a downward cycle.

Again, I say to Ontarians—and I know my friend understands what I'm saying in this regard—if you can afford it, then please go ahead and do your usual Christmas shopping. Buy that fridge, buy that car. Those are the kinds of things that help our economy and help maintain existing jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, just last week, for example, in the auto parts sector, Magna, the largest auto parts company literally in the world, announced almost 1,000 layoffs right next door, in a neighbouring city. Just in the last couple of weeks, in the communications sector, Canwest Global and CTV—hundreds of layoffs. What started as tens of thousands of jobs lost in the forestry sector three years ago, and then moving into the manufacturing sector, is now moving into the auto parts sector and into the communications sector.

Is it the McGuinty government's position that the response to this should simply be, "Oh, gee, just go shopping"?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think I've answered that a couple of times now, so I won't answer it again. But my honourable colleague did raise an important issue about the auto sector.

I want to report to this House that late on Friday, Ministers Bryant and Clement sent a formal request to the Detroit Three to come forward with a specific proposal with respect to their plans to strengthen their operations here in Canada and, indeed, throughout North America. We hope to be able to announce very shortly as well a due diligence team that will conduct the necessary investigation into the financial status of our Big Three and confirm that they are in fact making genuine efforts to complete a transformation. That's just another example of some of the efforts we are making to further strengthen our economy.

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ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: It seems to me that you've been sending people out to study this and that for some time. The former Treasurer has been studying tourism for, I think, almost a year. We see the tourism numbers continue to drop. You've had your former Minister of Natural Resources turn over another report that addressed some things that need to be done to take on job loss. Your government completely ignored that. Yes, Mr. Bryant has been to Washington, and about all we heard out of that was, "Blame Washington," and, "Blame Ottawa."

Premier, the time for studies and the time for telling people to go shopping is literally long past. We've got a federal government in Ottawa that is about to fall because they are not taking the situation seriously enough. My question to you is: What is the McGuinty government's plan, other than, "Go shopping"?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let me just say again some of the things we've done to help strengthen our economy. Our Reaching Higher plan consists of a \$6.2-billion investment in post-secondary education in Ontario. I'm not sure there is anything we could do that would be more important than to invest in the skills and education of our workers, so that we can enhance our competitiveness. As a result of those investments, we have a 100,000 more young people in our colleges and universities, we have 50,000 more young people in our apprenticeship programs and we're graduating between 10,000 and 11,000 more young people from our high schools—young people who used to drop out. We think that's a significant and important investment to enhance our competitiveness and productivity. Furthermore, investing in skills and education simply enriches our enjoyment of life. For all those reasons, we will continue to support the skills and education of our workers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The question is, where is the jobs plan? You announced something that you call Reaching Higher. Your so-called Reaching Higher means

that your government's investment in post-secondary education is dead last in Canada on a per capita basis. I don't call that Reaching Higher; I call that finishing at the bottom of the pack. But that is not a jobs plan either.

I think you need to recognize the urgency of the situation. When Magna, the largest auto parts producer in the world, which has very deep pockets and can go to literally any bank or finance company and get financing, starts announcing close to a thousand layoffs right here, it tells you that lots of other smaller companies are on the edge of the cliff. Where is the jobs plan, Premier? Where is the McGuinty government's—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: In addition to our investment in post-secondary education, we also have a number of programs that are designed to encourage further new investment in the province of Ontario. There was our \$500-million auto investment strategy, for example, which leveraged some \$7 billion worth of new investment. My friend asks, "Where is our job plan?" But when we came forward with that auto investment strategy, he wouldn't support that.

We have in place now our Next Generation of Jobs Fund. It's \$1.15 billion—one of a kind in North America. My friend doesn't support that either. We're investing in an advanced manufacturing investment strategy—\$500 million—that's designed to elicit new investment in Ontario and new jobs as well. My friend opposite doesn't support that as well. We have significant programs in place to create new jobs for Ontarians. It's just that my friend doesn't support them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I want to be very clear with the people of Ontario: New Democrats do not support a McGuinty government scheme that gives \$200 million to General Motors and doesn't get any meaningful product guarantees or job guarantees. We do not support giving \$200 million to General Motors, and the next week literally thousands of General Motors workers are shown the door. I don't think many people in Ontario support such a giveaway.

The things that you recite either have been a failure or they have not been effective strategies in terms of addressing the huge loss of jobs, a job loss pattern which is going to grow worse. I ask again of the Premier: Where is the McGuinty government's plan? Where is the strategy to take this on, other than telling people to go shopping?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I can understand how it's in my colleague's interest to somehow have Ontarians believe that the global economic crisis has no bearing on the Ontario economy whatsoever, but I just don't think that's credible and I don't think Ontarians will believe that.

I think as well, when I take the opportunity, for example, this afternoon to meet again with CAW—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll be meeting with CAW again this afternoon. I am confident that if I revisit the idea of investing together with our Big Three here in the province of Ontario—they're very supportive of that \$200-million investment that we made in GM. Workers at that plant are very supportive of that investment that we made together with GM. So we will continue to find ways to partner with the auto sector, the CAW and the federal government to put our auto sector on a stronger, more sustainable footing.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Health: Minister, the first word of the LHIN acronym is "local." However, your LHINs are certainly not taking local issues and situations into account when allocating funding. Let me give you an example: the C. difficile outbreak that the province watched unfold from a very comfortable distance and did not contribute financially to—not one red cent.

Minister, why are you abandoning Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital and leaving them with deficits that are due to your inappropriate levels of funding?

Hon. David Caplan: I say to the member opposite that she is quite incorrect. In fact, we've increased health care spending in the province of Ontario by 37% and we've made the right investments in our hospitals. The investments in Joseph Brant Memorial, for example, include more than \$17 million in base funding since 2003-04. That's nearly a 20% increase in funding to that hospital; over \$60 million in the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Local Health Integration Network toward a three-year, local aging-at-home strategy; \$113,000 for 102 general surgeries. That's in addition to the over \$13 million in total funding the hospital has received since 2004 to reduce wait times. That's over 15,000 more procedures and that's the kind—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: The reality is these increased levels of funding are not appropriately funding the hospital and beds are still closing. Your platitudes and trumped-up notion of your accomplishments are not going to help the people of Burlington who will be turned away when their hospital closes yet more beds.

The reality is that your government implemented the single largest tax increase disguised as a health premium on the struggling middle class, and yet, when it comes down to tough times, the first thing that your government will cut is health care. Minister, can you explain to the people of Burlington, who have been paying your health tax for many years now, why you refuse to invest their own health tax money in their own community hospital?

Hon. David Caplan: I think I explained that base funding has increased 20% since 2003-04 at Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital. In contrast, when the Conservative Party came into office, they cut hospital funding to

Joseph Brant by over \$3 million, or 6.25%. I say to the member opposite that I am delighted to go to Burlington or to meet her in this House to compare and contrast the records of her colleagues and this government, because I can assure the member opposite that the cuts pale in comparison to the investments which we have made in Joseph Brant. We have a plan that is working; we are increasing investments in our hospital and, importantly, in our community-based services. We have seen, as the Premier had mentioned earlier—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

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ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier: Why was the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth forced to seek legal action against the McGuinty government to obtain documents involving a young person who asked for his help?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me begin by saying I have enormous respect for the advocate as an individual and for the office of the advocate. The commitment that this government has to children and youth is clearly evidenced by our record. In fact, we were the ones who established the independent office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, which provides advocacy and an independent voice to some of the most vulnerable kids in this province.

The confidentiality and privacy provisions of the legislation were crafted in consultation with the Information and Privacy Commissioner to protect the privacy and legal rights of the child. Given that the advocate is now independent, it represents a new relationship. We're working very closely with the advocate to develop the protocol for information sharing as we go forward. This protocol—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is an unprecedented action that's happening here. The Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth was repeatedly stonewalled and had no choice but to go to the courts to seek information. This is an officer of this Legislature. He has a job to do. It took this government long enough to get him to be an independent officer, and now all this government is doing is stonewalling his work. Why is it taking so long for the ministry to provide the child advocate with the information he needs, and why won't this government facilitate his important job, instead of hamstringing him?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We are absolutely facilitating the work. I think it's important that I can't speak to this particular case, but I can speak to the request for information. The request for this information was received on November 5, 2008, and the ministry has been working to compile the information requested while aligning the privacy requirements of the YCJA and

FIPPA. The ministry will be contacting the office of the advocate today to inform him that that information will be forthcoming this week.

As I said earlier, we are working to develop the protocol. It is a new relationship. He is newly independent. We want him to have the information he needs, but we must also abide by the privacy requirements.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. Purdue Pharma Canada is located in my riding of Pickering-Scarborough East. Purdue has never undergone layoffs in Canada, and the company employs over 200 Ontarians and is Pickering's fourth-largest private sector employer. With 75% of its employees living in the region, Purdue has a strong connection to the community. Purdue donated a pill-forming machine to the faculty of science at UOIT, used to train students preparing to enter this industry. Purdue hires graduates from Durham College and brings in co-op students from the pharmaceutical and food science technology diploma program.

In April, our government announced an investment of \$13.9 million in Sanofi Pasteur, contributing to their \$101.5-million expansion. This secured 900 existing jobs, created 30 new permits, high-skilled research jobs and about 300 construction jobs. As Purdue looks to expand and hire more people, what has the Minister of Research and Innovation done to help make this a reality?

Hon. John Wilkinson: Last Thursday I was delighted to join the member for Pickering-Scarborough East and also his colleague next door from Ajax-Pickering to stand with the Premier at Purdue Pharma in Pickering for a wonderful announcement for Pickering and the province of Ontario. Purdue Pharma will be launching in January a 26,000-square-foot expansion. It will result in the doubling of their research space, it will hire 53 more people in the short term, it will create another 100 jobs, and this \$32-million expansion has attracted a \$4.9-million conditional grant from the Ministry of Research and Innovation through the biopharmaceutical investment program.

We are particularly proud to partner with Purdue, a wonderful company in the Pickering area, as it works to increase the economic opportunities in Pickering, and I want to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Minister, Purdue has sites worldwide where it conducts manufacturing and R&D. In making decisions regarding where to invest, it considers factors like the availability of skilled workers and resources. They also take into account those broader factors such as the overall business climate.

Purdue Pharma Canada's president, John Stewart, is quoted as saying, "Ontario's participation was critical to getting this project off the ground. It will enable us to build our research and manufacturing capacity and bring

more people on board here in Pickering." Investments like these are making Ontario more attractive to researchers around the world.

Just last week, it was announced that professor Stephen Hawking, perhaps the world's most famous scientist, is the Waterloo Perimeter Institute's new, distinguished research chair. What is the ministry doing to attract and retain talented innovators and researchers to the province?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to say to the member that it is wonderful news that Dr. Hawking will be coming to the Perimeter Institute in Kitchener. We welcome him from Cambridge. He is considered one of the great theoretical physicists of all time—and part of that is because his colleague Dr. Neil Turok is the new executive director of the Perimeter Institute; he also hails from Cambridge.

I want to pay tribute to the people at Perimeter for this amazing work. The fact that so many people in Ontario are watching this on television right now, that we use the Internet—it's all based on the fact that at one time, a theoretical physicist in his or her mind's eye was able to conceive that. It's because of the breakthroughs that we have all of the high-tech things. If we're going to stay at the forefront of the 21st century, we need to attract the best in the world here to Ontario to make those fundamental discoveries that will transform our economy and generate new jobs in Ontario.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Last Thursday, the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth wrote to tell me that your ministry will not provide him information about a young person allegedly beaten while in custody. Your repeated refusals to provide the information he needs to protect young people have now led to his taking legal action against your ministry. Minister, why do you need to wait for the threat of legal action before you take action?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you for the question. I am glad to have a second opportunity to discuss this issue.

The Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, the independent officer, was something that was created for this government. We take great pride in having an independent advocate for children and youth. It's an important position, and I'm proud to be part of a government that made that priority.

Let's be really clear about what this issue is. It's about a request for information. As a government, we have a responsibility to balance the privacy interests of the child with the request for information from the advocate. The confidentiality and privacy provisions of the advocate's legislation was something that was negotiated—crafted in consultation with the Information and Privacy Commissioner. We are working on how to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Minister, your government created the advocate's office. You appointed the advocate as an officer of this Legislature. In the answer that you gave a moment ago, you indicated the fact that this was a problem that you had been working on, so my question to you is, why did you not create that balance that you refer to in the creation of this legislation? Either the legislation is flawed or you really don't want to protect children. Which is it?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me completely reject the idea that we don't want to protect children. Let me tell you that we have—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We are working very closely with the advocate. They met on October 31 and have continued to meet thereafter to establish the protocol for information-sharing. It is not simply a matter of xeroxing the reports and sending them over to the advocate. We have to be careful. We have to respect the FIPPA regulations; we have to get the permission of the youth. There is a protocol that is involved. We are working very closely with the advocate to make sure he has the tools he needs to do the job.

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POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Last week, the Minister of Children and Youth Services mentioned two suggestions made by the 650 Ontarians who responded to the government's online poverty consultation: (1) The desire for support to move from social assistance into employment, and (2) the problem of intergenerational poverty. I assume the government has done a detailed analysis of the online submissions, so therefore my question: Could the minister please tell us how many of the 650 respondents mentioned these two suggestions, and where did they fit in terms of all the other suggestions made?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Breaking the cycle of poverty is something that we really simply must do. We know that the cost of poverty is far too high. There was an excellent report released last week that actually outlines and quantifies for the first time the cost of poverty. We know that poverty does in fact have an intergenerational dimension to it. We all know from our work in our ridings that there are families that face real challenges. Breaking the cycle, making sure that kids growing up in poverty do have the opportunity to be successful at school, to go on to be independent and productive people, is a really important priority of this government. We have in our education system really tried to level the playing field for kids growing up in poverty, and we will continue to do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: Obviously, the minister has not read her own report or the online submissions. The gov-

ernment is about to release its poverty plans, but it still is not clear that it has rigorously analyzed the submissions made during the poverty consultations.

The NDP did analyze the 170,000 words of online submissions and found the five most frequently mentioned recommendations were as follows: (1) The need for more affordable housing, (2) the need for free social and recreational programs for young people, (3) the need for increased ODSP, Ontario Works and child benefits, (4) faster increases to the minimum wage, and (5) more affordable child care. Those were the ones.

Will the minister tell us whether this government's analysis also found these to be the top priorities for reducing poverty and assure the House that these priorities will be addressed in the upcoming poverty reduction plan?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I know the member opposite is very anxious to see the strategy and I know that many people across the province are very anxious to see the strategy. I can assure you that we are on track to release the strategy by the end of the year.

Will we be addressing the issues that were raised in consultations? Absolutely. Will we be building on the work that we're already doing? Absolutely. Will we be looking to the best research that's out there that tells us how we can address the fundamental factors influencing poverty in this province? Absolutely.

I'm delighted that the member opposite is as engaged in this issue as he is, and I look forward to his continued support to reduce poverty in this province.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Mr. Phil McNeely: Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: Minister, I first want to congratulate you for the successful conclusion of the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review in partnership with Ontario's municipalities. Our government, with the partnership and hard work of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the city of Toronto, reached a consensus agreement that will make a difference for Ontario communities, including my own community of Ottawa-Orléans.

We are all aware of the downloading by the former government and the difficulties municipalities had dealing with the cost of many services formerly delivered by the province. Uploading is well under way under our government. Minister, could you outline what that agreement is and how it will impact Ontario municipalities and communities?

Hon. Jim Watson: I thank the honourable member for Ottawa-Orléans. When we sat down with the municipal sector under the auspices of the fiscal and service delivery review, they told us that their three top priorities were uploading costs for the Ontario drug plan and the Ontario disability support program, as well as Ontario Works and court security and prisoner transportation. I'm very pleased that we reached a consensus agreement that

will see those three items uploaded to the provincial government and taken away from the municipal property taxpayers.

Let me quote the new president of AMO, Peter Hume, who is a city councillor in Ottawa, when he said the report turns the page “on that dark chapter in provincial-municipal relations.... The consensus reflected in this report sets out the changes that reflect the highest priorities of our municipal governments and what can be accomplished in current economic circumstances.”

It's a good deal for municipalities, it's a good deal for Ontario, and we're very proud to see this uploading that began five years ago—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Minister. Again, in my riding of Ottawa-Orléans, the municipal councillor of Innes ward specifically took aim at the province of Ontario during a city of Ottawa budget consultation meeting recently in my riding

It is my position that the McGuinty government in Ontario has significantly contributed to the city of Ottawa through the gas tax transfers, through the Move Ontario fund, and through the recent \$77 million for infrastructure that Minister Naqvi and I announced a few weeks ago, including \$33 million to the Ottawa River cleanup and \$15 million for social housing retrofits.

I know that we've been a real partner for the city of Ottawa and for all municipalities in Ontario. Outside of uploading court security and offender transportation costs, our government is also uploading public health care and land ambulance, and beginning a 10-year plan that will ensure that these uploads are being implemented at an affordable pace that reflects the current global economic crisis.

Could the minister tell this House about the increased contributions to the city of Ottawa and how he arrived at this landmark agreement with the municipalities of Ontario?

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me begin by thanking the honourable member, who joined me and my colleague from Ottawa Centre at Petrie Island beach. If there's one person in this province who can take responsibility for ensuring provincial funds are going to the cleanup of the Ottawa River, it's the member from Ottawa-Orléans, and he should be congratulated for that.

That \$77-million investing in Ontario investment—the city has agreed to put \$33 million into the cleanup of the Ottawa River. The deal that we struck between AMO, the city of Toronto and the province of Ontario will see \$122 million flow to the city of Ottawa on an annual basis. That includes, in 2009, close to \$18 million as a result of the Ontario disability support program administrative costs being uploaded. It's a good deal for the city of Ottawa. It's a good deal for the province of Ontario and for our municipalities, and we look forward to working with our municipalities to strengthen that relationship.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier: The latest sign of Dalton McGuinty's have-not Ontario—the number of houses sold in the GTA has dropped by a shocking 44% in November. Even outside of the GTA in the riding of your agriculture minister, in Bancroft, the average price of a home has fallen by some 15%. Here's the catch: Those Bancroft homeowners are being hit by average property assessment increases of 31.5%, some paying even more.

Premier, do you think it's fair that families in Bancroft who are seeing the value of their homes fall will be paying higher property taxes as a result of your new assessment scheme?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: The honourable member was involved in his government's feeble attempts to reform the assessment system eight different times, and they got it wrong eight different times. The honourable member knows full well, the taxpayers of this province know full well, that an increase in assessment does not automatically equate to an increase in property taxes, number one.

The member asks about Bancroft. As a result of the fiscal and service delivery review, as a result of the Investing in Ontario Act, more money is flowing to communities like Bancroft to ensure that they have the economic and fiscal stability to ensure that they do not have to be adversely affected as a result of changes in assessment.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I guess, back to the minister from wonderland. He knows full well, if assessed values are going up by some 31.5%, that hard-working families and seniors in the Bancroft area are going to get whacked with higher property taxes under McGuinty's new assessment scheme.

The minister may also know that Northumberland county residents, the home area of the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, are seeing average assessment increases of 28%, with many seniors and families seeing much higher assessments. The minister knows that your new scheme locks them in at the height of a hot housing market. Since January 1, home values in Cobourg and Port Hope, for example, have actually fallen by 6%.

Minister, why are you punishing Northumberland homeowners who are experiencing declines in the value of their homes with much higher property taxes?

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Hon. Jim Watson: Thank goodness we have Lou Rinaldi as the MPP for Northumberland, because he has delivered for the constituents of Northumberland.

Let me just tell you: In 2006, \$2.8 million in roads and bridges money; in 2008, over \$2 million for roads and bridges money; the Investing in Ontario Act, over \$1 million has gone to the good people of Northumberland as a result of decisions made by the McGuinty government.

Let me quote someone that I know the honourable member is very fond of, Ernie Eves, when he said, "I want to get a point across because everybody, whether you're a homeowner or whether you're a business owner, is now getting their assessment notice. The assessment notice is not a tax bill. It is a statement of what the assessment corporation believes your property to be worth in current value...."

Even the Ombudsman recognized the work that this government has done to fix the mess that the Conservatives created with the assessment system when he said the impact and the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Earlier this fall, as a matter of fact nearly two months ago, I wrote the minister and asked a question regarding this government's lack of goodwill to the de-amalgamation vote in the city of Kawartha Lakes.

I haven't yet had a response, so I'm asking you today in the House, why won't the ministry tell the people of Kawartha Lakes why it accepted the democratic election of a council but would not recognize the democratic results of the second question on the same ballot; that is, the desire of those people for de-amalgamation? How can part of a ballot be recognized by your government and the other part not be recognized?

Hon. Jim Watson: This government has been very clear. We've set out the parameters and the criteria when it comes to the issue of governance structures within the province of Ontario. We, quite frankly, believe that it's up to the local municipal sector, whether it's through the county system, a region or the lower-tier municipalities, to come forward with a plan that shows fiscal viability in terms of any changes and also shows the support of all of the parties involved. We're happy to entertain those kinds of requests when they come in.

We're proud of the relationship that we have developed with the municipal sector. This is not a top-down approach that this government has taken when it comes to dealing with the municipal sector. We went through that period under the NDP, under the Conservatives. We've taken a more co-operative and consultative approach, and we're very proud of the work we've done with Kawartha and other regions and counties in the province.

Mr. Michael Prue: This minister doesn't answer the question any better than the former one.

The town and county of Essex is now considering its desire to de-amalgamate. The people of Essex are concerned that if the question is put on a municipal elections ballot for a referendum, the government will ignore the results of that vote just as they did with the people of Kawartha Lakes. Will the minister please tell these good people that he intends to accept the results of their

potential referendum, or will he choose to follow the lead of his predecessor and impose new, impossible conditions after the vote?

Hon. Jim Watson: I've actually had a number of conversations with respect to the Essex situation, including with our member from Essex. My understanding is that just as early as last week, that issue was not supported by county council.

We have taken a very positive approach when it comes to dealing with the municipal sector, because we understand that we have to treat them in true partnership. These are individuals who are providing the important services, and one of the reasons we believe that the relationship is on a much more positive footing under the leadership of our Premier is that we have actually sat down on a consultative basis every single month through the AMO MOU process to work out problems before they flare up and before they cause angst to a particular community, council mayor or residents of that community.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Answer.

Hon. Jim Watson: So we're proud of the MOU process. We just had our last meeting a few weeks ago. Ministers appear before this group. The process is working, and we're very proud of that

DRINKING AND DRIVING

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. There is no excuse in Ontario for drinking and driving, and while most Ontarians obey these rules, this message does not seem to be reaching everyone. In fact, in a recent OPP news release, it was reported that, last year alone, during the five-week period of the holiday RIDE program, officers charged 342 people with alcohol-related criminal offences, issued a further 896 12-hour licence suspensions and issued 375 90-day suspensions.

Minister, this is just unacceptable. It's a huge concern for my constituents in Willowdale and, indeed, for all Ontarians. What are you and what is your ministry doing to help reduce instances of drinking and driving throughout this province?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you very much for an excellent question, particularly at this time of year. I think there isn't any member of this House who thinks that it would be acceptable for people to be drinking and driving, in the holiday season or any time, so this is not something that is a partisan consideration. Each government, I think, has endeavoured to do this.

Last week, many services launched their festive season RIDE campaigns. We'll see significant increases in spot checks across the province, as our government, you will remember, doubled the funding for the RIDE program this year. With the winter weather experienced in some parts of the province, I'm sure that our officers were out in full force working to keep our roads safe.

Ontario's roads are among the safest in North America but you're always striving, as a government and as

members of this Legislature, to make them even safer. That's why MTO staff are continuously reviewing current policies, monitoring other jurisdictions and working with our safety partners—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. David Zimmer: Doubling the funding to the RIDE program aids with enforcement, but there is still a lot to be said about prevention and education aspects as well. Each year in Ontario, statistics continue to show that drinking and driving collisions are the cause of almost one quarter of all traffic fatalities. The behaviour of drinking and driving, especially of those repeat offenders, is a learned behaviour.

Minister, my constituents in Willowdale and indeed, again, all Ontarians want to see this behaviour stopped before it even begins. You talked about other initiatives that the government is moving forward with to keep our roads safe from impaired drivers. What are those other initiatives?

Hon. James J. Bradley: We have among the toughest sanctions in all of North America, and subsequent governments have worked on this. New measures are already in place to seize and forfeit the vehicles of repeat drunk drivers. That being said, the member is correct that both education and prevention are key to the reduction of drinking and driving. That is why the Ministry of Transportation has purchased a full page in the RIDE Checks booklet to educate the public on consequences of drinking and driving.

We have also recently introduced legislation that, if passed, will require zero blood alcohol concentration for drivers 21 and under. Zero BAC already works for novice drivers in the graduated licensing system. In the four years following its introduction, the fatal and injury collision rate involving the youngest drinking drivers, aged 16 and 17, fell by 76% and 53% respectively. We believe this initiative will drastically reduce drinking and driving on our roads as it teaches our youth, from the beginning of their driving career, to separate drinking—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: My question is for the Premier. While we're in the chamber, I just received an e-mail that another company is shutting down; 165 more individuals are being laid off in, well, about half an hour.

Premier, the impacts and stress on people in the community as a result of the impacts on the auto sector are just being felt. Saturday I met with the United Way and, for those who don't know, the CAW workers and the individuals at General Motors contribute over \$1.6 million annually to the United Way. Should the auto sector shut down—as a matter of fact, every week that General Motors shuts down means \$21,000 less to the United Way and the programs that they support. Premier, should the auto sector fail, who's going to pick up the \$1.6 million when the funds are most needed?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question. This is yet another issue which ought, if nothing else, to cause all of us to recommit ourselves to overcoming the challenge before us. The member indicated what would happen should the auto sector fail; well, I'm not prepared to allow the auto sector to fail in the province of Ontario.

The fact is, the CAW makes a wonderful contribution to the health and well-being of their communities. We've talked about helping the Big Three, but what we're talking about is helping 400,000 Ontario families that are supported as a result of the auto sector in the province of Ontario. When it comes to a sense of accountability, I think there's a shared accountability amongst all Ontarians to ensure we're doing everything we can to support those 400,000 Ontario families.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Premier, in a question earlier on, you mentioned a due diligence team. Will this due diligence team take into consideration the impacts on the United Way, the taxation base in the communities or any other aspect that is happening with the auto sector, in the event that it falls apart? We want to make sure that all aspects of community are taken into consideration. Hopefully, this due diligence team will look at those factors.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I don't know whether the terms of reference will incorporate that. I'll certainly want to give that consideration but I think that, ultimately, that's our responsibility as well, to take into account the harmful consequences that would flow from the continuing loss of the health and well-being of our auto sector in the province of Ontario.

It reaches into every community in the province with a car dealership, for example. Those dealerships employ people, and they've got their ads running on radios and supporting local baseball and hockey teams—you see their names on jerseys if you have kids in community hockey, as I did. So this is a very important issue for all of us, and that's why we remain absolutely committed to finding a way through to strengthening the auto sector and ensuring its continuing, long-term viability in the province of Ontario.

ALCOHOL AND DRUG TREATMENT

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for Minister of Health Promotion. Focus Community projects fund substance abuse prevention strategies in 22 communities across this province—some of them are in my constituency—communities that have no other mechanism to take on substance abuse, particularly amongst young people.

The Focus projects have been asking the McGuinty government for some time, "Is the McGuinty government going to continue to fund these strategies?" So far, they've received no response from the McGuinty government.

Is the McGuinty government going to continue to fund the Focus projects or are you going to cut these pro-

grams, which are the only substance abuse programs in literally dozens of communities across this province?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I thank the member opposite for his question. The McGuinty government has delivered and will continue to deliver programs that promote the health and well-being of all Ontarians. We provide \$2.4 million in annual funding to support the 22 communities across the province that participate in drug and alcohol prevention programs. In addition, \$400,000 is provided to provincial organizations that support alcohol and drug prevention activities in Ontario. This funding helps community partners work together to provide alcohol and drug prevention programs to those Ontarians who need them the most.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I don't need a description from the minister about what these programs do. Most of us know that they do very valuable work, and in many communities, they're the only community-based alcohol and substance abuse prevention strategies that are available to our youth.

The question is simple: These projects, located in dozens of communities, have been asking the McGuinty government, "Are you going to continue funding into 2009 and 2010? Are you going to continue funding at the same level?" So I'm going to ask the minister again: Is it the McGuinty government's intention to fund the Focus Community strategies in 2009 and 2010? Are you going to fund them at the same level and on the same basis that they were funded on since 1998? Yes or no?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Our government certainly recognizes the important work that the Focus program is doing to improve the health of all Ontarians. We have committed to providing funding to this program until March 2009. We will be gathering data on the program and will be analyzing it in the context of the Ministry of Health Promotion priorities and community needs. We know that mental health is a priority and a fundamental concern of this government, and we will continue to address the issue.

FLAG-RAISING CEREMONY

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just remind members too that there's a flag-raising with the Consul General of Romania, Valentin Naumescu, and his wife, Simina, and leaders of the Romanian-Canadian community. The Consul General's with us, and the flag-raising is at noon.

The time for question period has ended. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1135 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I would like to introduce a councillor from the town of Orangeville—who is, as we speak, going through security—in the beautiful riding of Dufferin-Caledon. His name is Doug Beffort.

MAURICE BOSSY

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I regret to inform the House that we've learned of the passing of a former member, Maurice Bossy, who was the MPP for Chatham-Kent from 1985 to 1990. On behalf of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, our regrets go out to his family, and I'd ask each member if they would join me in a moment of silence in memory of Maurice Bossy.

The House observed a moment's silence.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DHADKAN GROUP

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Heart disease affects all people regardless of religion, race, colour or creed—and even politics. Last night, however, my eyes were opened by the Dhadkan Group who showed me and 600 others in the nation's capital that heart disease and type 2 diabetes show prevalence in Canadians of Southeast Asian descent and, in particular, those whose lineage is from India.

For the past six years, the Dhadkan Group has been raising money for the Ottawa Heart Institute, and under the leadership of Anand Aggarwal, Dr. Parvesh Bajaj, Manjit Basi, Bharat Rudra and Vijay Tejuja, they have raised more than \$6.3 million to combat heart disease.

I am extremely grateful to Daljit Nirman, a lifetime patron of Dhadkan, for inviting me to share in last evening's sixth annual fundraising event, as well as to keynote speaker, Dr. Sonia Anand, of McMaster University, for her important and life-saving presentation.

As the host of last evening's event, Jyoti Aggarwal so brilliantly pointed out, even if one segment of the population is more susceptible to a disease, it requires an entire community to work together to combat that disease.

I congratulate the Dhadkan organizers and the Ottawa Heart Institute for their successful fundraising event, and above all, for the meaningful work that they do for the city of Ottawa.

CITY OF CORNWALL

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have frequently shared with this House the many amenities of my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry that would be of extreme benefit to families and businesses looking for a new place to settle.

The municipalities of my riding have done an excellent job of promoting themselves, most recently at the Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry Day I hosted here at Queen's Park on October 15.

Today, the city of Cornwall has launched a new marketing campaign with the theme Smart Decisions Start with Small Numbers. This campaign will include print advertising, Web advertising, direct mail and trade show activities.

In today's economic climate, numbers play a key factor in the decisions being made by businesses in the province. Consider: business park land costs \$20,000 per acre in Cornwall compared to \$75,000 or more in big cities; Cornwall has no development charges, which often add \$15,000 or more to development projects; and the average sale price of a house in Cornwall is half of what it is in most big cities, \$141,000 compared to \$285,000 or more.

The city of Cornwall and all the municipalities of my riding are competitive, directly and ideally located near major markets and boast an unmatched quality of life for business owners and their families. We also have a hard-working bilingual labour force.

I commend the city of Cornwall for this initiative and encourage everyone to visit www.ChooseCornwall.ca to learn more about why Cornwall is a city with a world of possibilities.

ROAD SAFETY

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I have been bombarded with e-mails recently regarding Bill 126, making valid points of how their lives will change if the bill becomes legislation.

The restriction on having more than two teenagers in a car assumes that this is a dangerous situation and assumes the worst of our teenaged drivers.

One of my constituents from Dufferin county coaches the University of Guelph rowing team. Rowing practice takes place at 5:30 a.m. and relies on carpooling to get everyone to the lake for that time. Most university programs like this rely on the athletes with vehicles to drive their teammates to practice, since there is no public transit system in place. If this legislation passes as it stands today, it will effectively shut down the Guelph rowing program.

A concerned mother from a rural area wrote to me as well. In her area, they travel 80 to 100 kilometres to play a game of hockey. What if her sons had no way to get there except carpooling? They would probably not be able to go. Her sons are regularly the designated drivers who stay sober and safely drive six people home.

This bill would effectively punish our youth for making good decisions and being responsible. Passing this bill as it is currently written will limit part-time jobs, athletic activities and transportation to school, and will have a negative effect on the environment. It will inconvenience teenagers and families who have legitimate reasons for multiple young people to be travelling together. This would be one more Liberal ban that will hurt rural Ontario.

BRAMPTON CIVIC HOSPITAL

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I rise today to congratulate the hard work and dedication of Dr. Frank Martino and all of the doctors, nurses and support staff who work hard each and every day at the Brampton Civic Hospital. Their hard work can not and should not go unnoticed.

Just recently, the College of Family Physicians of Canada awarded the Reg L. Perkin Award, which is only awarded to one physician in each province in Canada. I'm proud to say that the Ontario recipient was Dr. Frank Martino of Brampton Civic. Dr. Martino is a gifted physician who has helped countless patients recover from serious illnesses.

Brampton Civic Hospital has had its growing pains. This is a new hospital in Brampton and, like all new, large ventures, it has been adjusting to the needs of the community. However, that has not affected the excellent medical care that is provided by this facility. This hospital, under the leadership of Mr. Ken White and his board, has evolved into a world-class facility that all Bramptonians should be proud of.

Once again, I congratulate Dr. Frank Martino and all the people at Brampton Civic Hospital, and I encourage them to keep up their great work.

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise in the House today to remind the Minister of Health that Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital is in fact in Burlington, not Brantford, as the minister stated during question period.

Minister Caplan threw out all kinds of investments that his government has made into what I assume is our Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital. However, the minister refuses to take ownership of the costs associated with the C. difficile outbreak at our hospital. Not only was the hospital forced to fight this deadly outbreak with aging infrastructure, but without any supports from the McGuinty government whatsoever.

The local health integration network was created by Premier McGuinty for the purpose of addressing local needs. Well, this hospital funding model isn't working. Clearly, the LHINs are a puppet arm of the McGuinty government, because they are not taking into account local issues. This is just another way for the Premier to avoid blame and scrutiny. He can say, "Well, it's the LHIN's decision, not my fault." The problem is, Premier, that the residents of Burlington have contributed a significant amount of money into the McGuinty health tax. At the very minimum, they deserve to have access to their hospital, and they deserve that that hospital be capable of delivering services that meet current standards.

My colleagues and I know that the health tax is a sham, but we should not be penalized for the poor accounting practices of this government. The taxpayers of Burlington deserve to have their health tax reinvested in our community. Minister, you need to take LHINs—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, as you and all members of this chamber are well aware, Ontario and the world are

facing one of the greatest financial crises we've seen in decades, perhaps since the Great Depression.

We need substantial action in Ontario on our economy, on rebuilding manufacturing. We have an opportunity to look at the steps that are being taken in the United States. The United Steelworkers, under the leadership of Leo Gerard, are pressing for development of a new energy economy in that country, and that cry is being taken up in Rust Belt states all over the US. We here in Ontario could take on the jobs crisis following that strategy. We could take on the climate crisis following that strategy. We could retrofit every house, school, hospital, factory and office building in this province, putting hundreds of thousands of people to work, dealing with air pollution that kills 10,000 people a year in this province, and dealing with a climate crisis that, as we are all well aware, continues to grow and grow.

1310

I urge this government to look at the strategies being put forward by the Steelworkers, to take on board their advice and assessment and to actually bring forward an economic and environmental strategy that will take Ontario into the lead in dealing with these issues.

OTTAWA COMMUNITY IMMIGRANT SERVICES ORGANIZATION

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm pleased to rise today and highlight for members the great work being done by the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization, OCISO, in my riding of Ottawa Centre.

As you know, more than 8,000 immigrants and refugees come to Ottawa to make it their home. As a non-profit group, OCISO has been assisting immigrants and refugees address settlement and integration issues with award-winning programs, including English language training, since 1978.

On November 20, I had the pleasure of attending OCISO's 30th anniversary symposium and gala. Organized in the theme of setting a community agenda and creating a place for everyone, the anniversary conference highlighted critical issues facing immigrants in the larger Ottawa community and proposed meaningful move-forward solutions.

As honorary patron, I was pleased to see the conference bring together community service organizations, public institutions, academics, immigrants and the broader Ottawa community to have a robust dialogue about the importance of immigrants to our community's social vibrancy and overall well-being.

The gala dinner honoured community members and organizations that have made outstanding contributions to assisting immigrants and their families. OCISO also announced a scholarship to honour the former mayor of Ottawa, the late Marion Dewar.

I want to commend the executive director of OCISO, Hamdi Mohamed, and the board chair, Tyler Meredith,

along with the board of directors and all the staff and volunteers for their great service to the Ottawa community.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE OF GREATER FORT ERIE

Mr. Kim Craiton: Last week, I had the opportunity to visit the Fort Erie business development centre, which is funded by our government. This centre has a mandate to help promote small businesses, entrepreneurship and economic development in the town of Fort Erie. Under the capable leadership of Helen McCreadie and Marc Aquilina, the BDC offers business loans, counselling seminars, business development plans and government-sponsored self-employment programs.

The business development centre has been delivering the Ontario self-employment benefit and development programs. These two programs provide new entrepreneurs opportunity to create jobs for themselves by providing financial support, business plan development and mentoring during the first year of operations and, in some cases, enabling individuals to receive income support.

Many businesses fail during their first year in business. However, through the mentorship of the Fort Erie BDC and the financial support of OSEB, the survival rate of new business starts is over 85%, with 73% still in business in their fourth year. This is truly an amazing success rate and these two individuals deserve the thanks and congratulations of a grateful community and province, and this assembly.

I want to say thank you, Business Development Centre of Greater Fort Erie, for a job well done.

ROMANIA

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Ninety years ago, on December 1, 1918, the Romanian nation celebrated union with parades, banners flying, flowers and happy faces. So today on the front lawn of this Legislature, we celebrated the Romanian union by raising the Romanian flag. The areas of Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transylvania were joined, and that's why Romanians today are very proud of their country.

They were today joined by their organizations, and many of their people came. When the Romanian national anthem was playing and the flag was raised, I happened to be close enough to some of them. You could see them with tears streaming down their faces. It was an emotional moment. I would only hope that when the Canadian flag is ever raised that we have those emotions as well. We honoured this nation, Romania; we honoured their history today; we honoured their sacrifices. When they looked at their flag, they saw it all wrapped up, emotional and celebratory at the same time.

Today, as we celebrate the modern Romania and its entrance into the united Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, we are mindful also of the contributions Romanian Canadians made to our country, because

we find them in all aspects of life. I say to all Romanians, abroad and here, [*Remarks in Romanian*].

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Standing order 63(a) provides that “The Standing Committee on Estimates shall present one report with respect to all of the estimates and supplementary estimates considered pursuant to standing orders 60 and 62 no later than the third Thursday in November of each calendar year.”

The House not having received a report from the Standing Committee on Estimates for certain ministries on Thursday, November 27, 2008, as required by the Standing Orders of this House and by order of the House dated October 9, 2008, pursuant to Standing Order 63(b), the estimates before the committee of the Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Public Infrastructure and Renewal, and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing are deemed to be passed by the committee and are deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

Accordingly, the estimates 2008-09 of these ministries are deemed to be passed by the Standing Committee on Estimates and are deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

Report deemed received.

PETITIONS

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with government Bill 126 and it reads:

“Petition on Bill 126:

“Whereas the McGuinty government’s Bill 126, Road Safety Act, 2008, unfairly targets and discriminates against teen drivers; and

“Whereas laws are already in place that punish drivers of all ages who speed and drink and drive; and

“Whereas this bill discourages carpooling and punishes teens who live in areas that don’t have public transportation; and

“Whereas all citizens should be treated the same under the law;

“Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the provincial government revoke Bill 126 and enforce the laws that are already in place to deal with speeders and impaired drivers of all ages.”

I support this petition.

BATHURST HEIGHTS ADULT LEARNING CENTRE

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to save the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there are over 2,000 adult ESL students being served by the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre, operated by the Toronto District School Board, in partnership with the province; and

“Whereas this is the only English as a second language (ESL) learning centre in this area of the city located directly on the Spadina subway line, making it accessible for students across the city; and

“Whereas newcomers to Toronto, and in the Lawrence Heights area, need the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre so they can succeed in their career opportunities; and

“Whereas the proposed revitalization of Lawrence Heights threatens the existence of the centre;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that any revitalization of Lawrence Heights include a newcomer centre and ensure that the Bathurst Heights centre continues to exist in the present location.”

I support this petition from the students of Bathurst Heights and affix my name to it.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition reads as follows:

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services, Madeleine Meilleur, has decided that grandparents caring for their grandchildren no longer qualify for temporary care assistance; and

“Whereas the removal of the temporary care assistance could mean that children will be forced into foster care; and

“Whereas the temporary care assistance amounted to \$231 per month, much less than a foster family would receive to look after the same children if they were forced into foster care;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately reverse the decision to remove temporary care assistance for grandparents looking after their grandchildren.”

I fully support this petition and affix my signature to it.

1320

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Kim Craiton: I’m pleased to introduce these petitions from Alex Alexander and his wife, Olga, who have submitted over 1,500 petitions to me. The petition reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children’s Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their parents and grandparents, as requested in Bill 33, put forward by” the member for Niagara Falls.

“Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreason-

ably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant’s willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children’s Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their parents and grandparents.”

I’m pleased to sign my name in support of this and present it to the House.

LABORATORY SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with the community lab service. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the residents of the communities served by Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare (MAHC) wish to maintain current community lab services; and

“Whereas maintaining community lab services promotes physician retention and benefits family health teams; and

“Whereas the funding for community lab services is currently a strain on the operating budget of MAHC; and

“Whereas demand for health services is expected to continue to rise with a growing retirement population in Muskoka-East Parry Sound; and

“Whereas the operating budget for MAHC needs to reflect the growing demand for service in the communities of Muskoka-East Parry Sound;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the McGuinty government and the Minister of Health increase the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to permit continued operation of community lab services.”

I support this petition.

HOSPICES

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas hospices on church or hospital property do not pay taxes;

“Whereas hospices are not-for-profit organizations providing emotional, spiritual and bereavement support and respite care to terminally ill individuals and their family members;

“Whereas a residential hospice (usually an eight- to 10-bed home-like facility) provides around-the-clock care to terminally ill individuals and support to their families;

“Whereas hospice services are provided free of charge;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow hospices across the province to be exempt from municipal taxes.”

I agree with this petition, will sign my signature and send it to the table with Zac.

FERTILITY TREATMENT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition is about funding for in vitro fertilization, and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the prevalence and growing incidence of infertility in our population is a medical issue that demands the attention of our public health care system and should be placed on the agenda for funding;

“Whereas fertility treatment, including in vitro fertilization, is a proven medical solution that is unfairly limited to those with the financial means to pursue it, and it should receive significant coverage through the Ontario health care system as soon as possible;

“Whereas in vitro fertilization should be fully funded when deemed medically necessary, without discrimination based on cause or gender; and

“Whereas it is long overdue that financial assistance for fertility treatment be offered to Ontarians. We,” the undersigned, “are residents of the province of Ontario and request that the Ontario provincial government address this important issue.

“We ... strongly support the inclusion of financial assistance by the Ontario Ministry of Health under the Ontario health care program for all fertility treatment for Ontarians,” be they male or be they female.

And since I agree, I am delighted to sign my name to this petition.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I have a petition and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services, Madeleine Meilleur, has decided that grandparents caring for their grandchildren no longer qualify for temporary care assistance; and

“Whereas the removal of the temporary care assistance could mean that children will be forced into foster care; and

“Whereas the temporary care assistance amounted to \$231 per month, much less than a foster family would

receive to look after the same children if they were forced into foster care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately reverse the decision to remove temporary care assistance for grandparents looking after their grandchildren."

I support this petition and affix my name to it.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from a number of constituents from my riding.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents,

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the Clerks' table.

LOGGING ROUTE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with logging in the village of Restoule. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Nipissing forest management plan proposes to use Hawthorne Drive in Restoule, which features a single-lane bridge and narrow and steep sections; and

"Whereas area residents have grave concerns about community safety, traffic speed, truck noise and general wear and tear of Hawthorne Drive and the bridge in the village of Restoule; and

"Whereas the proposed route travels past the Restoule Canadian Legion and two churches; and

"Whereas alternate routes are possible via Odorizzi Road and Block 09-056;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety and concerns of the people of Restoule ahead of logging interests and ensure an alternate route is selected for the Nipissing forest management plan."

I support this petition.

LUPUS

Mr. Kim Craiton: I'm pleased to introduce a petition on behalf of the Lupus Foundation of Ontario, located in Ridgeway, Ontario. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no new safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

I'm more than pleased to sign my signature in support of this petition.

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GO TRANSIT TUNNEL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: "To the Parliament of Ontario, the minister of infrastructure services and the Minister of Transportation:

"Whereas GO Transit is presently planning to tunnel an area just south of St. Clair Avenue West and west of Old Weston Road, making it easier for GO trains to pass a major rail crossing;

"Whereas TTC is presently planning a TTC right-of-way along all of St. Clair Avenue West, including the bottleneck caused by the dilapidated St. Clair Avenue-Old Weston Road bridge;

"Whereas this bridge," which is an underpass, "will be: (1) too narrow for the planned TTC right-of-way, since it will leave only one lane for traffic; (2) it is not safe for pedestrians (it's about 50 metres long). It's dark and slopes on both east and west sides, creating high

banks for 300 metres; and (3) it creates a divide, a no man's land, between Old Weston Road and Keele Street. (This was acceptable when the area consisted entirely of slaughterhouses, but now the area has 900 new homes);

"Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that GO Transit extend the tunnel beyond St. Clair Avenue West so that trains will pass under St. Clair Avenue West, thus eliminating this eyesore of a bridge with its high banks and blank walls. Instead it will create a dynamic, revitalized community enhanced by a beautiful continuous cityscape with easy traffic flow."

I certainly agree with this petition and I'm delighted to put my name to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to read this petition on behalf of my seatmate from Mississauga–Streetsville. It reads as follows:

"Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

"Western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer ... stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 ... budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I'm pleased to sign my signature to this petition in support.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LAKE SIMCOE PROTECTION ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA PROTECTION DU LAC SIMCOE

Mr. Gerretsen moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 99, An Act to protect and restore the ecological health of the Lake Simcoe watershed and to amend the Ontario Water Resources Act in respect of water quality trading / Projet de loi 99, Loi visant à protéger et à

rétablir la santé écologique du bassin hydrographique du lac Simcoe et à modifier la Loi sur les ressources en eau de l'Ontario en ce qui concerne un système d'échange axé sur la qualité de l'eau.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the minister for his leadoff speech.

Hon. John Gerretsen: I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member from Oakville. Before going any further, let me just thank him and, indeed, all the members of the committee for the hard work that they've done on this particular bill, as well as many, many other people, going back some 20 years, who I will be mentioning a little bit later on.

Let me also thank the members of the opposition for their active participation in the committee hearings. I had the opportunity to watch a lot of the hearings a week ago Friday, when they were rebroadcast on the parliamentary channel. I happened to see both of the public sessions and can well appreciate the hard work and dedication by those people who appeared before the committee; also, the very proactive work that was done by all members of the committee at that point in time to give this bill the proper kind of scrutiny it requires.

Last year, Premier McGuinty stood before the members of the Lake Simcoe community in August 2007. This is a community that has been concerned about the health and safety of the lake for many, many years. He recalled at that point in time a saying that has been said many times before, but the way he said it I think is significant. He basically said that we do not inherit the earth from our ancestors but we borrow it from our children. He committed to the individuals who were there on that particular occasion that our government would permanently protect Lake Simcoe so that our children and our children's children would be able to enjoy its beautiful waters for generations to come. Today we are on the edge of fulfilling this particular promise.

If passed, this legislation would secure the legacy of Lake Simcoe for Ontarians well into the future. It will help preserve the health of the water, its fish, aquatic plants and animals, and it will protect the watershed that supports some of the most ecologically significant wetlands, woodlands and farmlands in Ontario. It will also ensure that the 350,000 people in the eight communities that surround the lake and who draw upon its waters every day can continue to depend on it as their population and economy grow.

Perhaps for the benefit of those Ontarians who may not be all that familiar with Lake Simcoe, let me just give you a few facts about the lake. It was named after John Graves Simcoe, the Lieutenant Governor of Canada, in 1793. At the time of the first European contact back in the 17th century, the lake was called—and I hope I have the pronunciation correct—Ouentironk, meaning beautiful water, by the Huron natives. It's located about an hour north of Toronto, and it has a service area of about 30 kilometres in length and 25 kilometres in width, so it has a service area of about 750 square kilometres. The average depth of the lake is 15 metres, with a maximum depth of about 41 metres.

There are about 35 rivers that flow into Lake Simcoe, including the Holland River, the Black River, the Beaver River and the Uxbridge Brook; as well, about 4,000 kilometres of streams flow into the lake. It provides the drinking water for about eight different communities, as I mentioned before, but it also receives treated discharges from about 15 sewage treatment plants that are located at or near the lake.

As we all know, it includes a provincially significant prime agricultural area as well. The most common and best-known area, I suppose, is the Holland Marsh, where we have dominant crops which include lettuce, carrots, onions, celery, corn and alfalfa, and livestock production that includes beef cattle, poultry and horses. People may be surprised to hear that it has an annual value of farm production that exceeded \$300 million in the year 2006 alone.

It's also an important tourist destination year-round, through fishing, boating, cottaging and swimming, and of course it's a very significant link in the Trent-Severn water system that flows from Lake Ontario to Lake Huron. Maybe it's the other way around. It's probably from Lake Huron to Lake Ontario. It has recreational activities—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: You'd better figure that one out.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Yes. I remember somebody else had that one wrong at one point in time. But it is right: from Huron to Lake Ontario.

Recreational activities alone generate more than \$200 million a year for the local economy.

But with all the development that has taken place and all the people who live there, people may be interested in knowing that approximately 35%—so more than a third—of the Lake Simcoe watershed is under natural cover with woodlands and wetlands. It supports a wide range of aquatic fish, coldwater fish such as lake trout and whitefish. Traditionally, the Lake Simcoe area has been known as Canada's ice-fishing capital, although the lake no longer currently supports a naturally breeding cold-water fishery. That's just one of the threats to the lake the way it currently exists.

There are other threats as well: excessive phosphorus and other pollutants such as chloride, organic carbon, iron, toxic metals, organic chemicals and inorganic pesticides and pharmaceuticals. Invasive species are there: the rusty crayfish, the round goby, and the zebra mussel. And, of course, climate change is having its effect there, as it has in so many other places as well. There is a loss and fragmentation of natural areas and habitat, and changes to the hydrological cycle and human use of fish and other resources.

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So you could well see from the description I have given that it's absolutely essential to protect the lake the best way that we know how.

Once again, if this legislation is passed, it will secure the legacy of Lake Simcoe for Ontarians well into the future. It would preserve the health of the water, its fish

and aquatic plants and animals. Bill 99 would have a unique potential to impact people, communities and economies all across Ontario.

If passed, the Lake Simcoe Protection Act would allow us to develop and implement the Lake Simcoe protection plan, which would set the gold standard for water sustainability. Let me just underscore that: What we have here in the bill today is basically the enabling legislation that would allow the government, through the Ministry of the Environment, to develop a plan for Lake Simcoe. It is my belief that building a clean, healthy future based on the sustainability of our water and our resources, and in support of our quality of life, is one of the most important goals that we can realize as legislators. The legislation would allow us to be better stewards of the environment that all of us have been entrusted to protect.

Our government has focused on a clean, safe and healthy environment as a matter of principle and priority since our election in 2003. We have brought in pioneering legislation and put critical measures in place, including major steps to protect and preserve our water. If you remember, we have introduced a Clean Water Act, which protects Ontario's existing and future drinking water sources. We're working with the federal government to improve and protect the health of the Great Lakes basin ecosystem, and with the states and provinces surrounding the basin on water conservation and efficiency programs.

We've put in place some of the most rigorous water protection measures in North America, including a strengthened ban on water diversions. If passed, this act complements that work. Through it, we will tackle threats to the water quality and ecological integrity of the largest inland lake other than the Great Lakes in southern Ontario. And by reducing phosphorus and other pollutants, responding to new and emerging threats such as invasive species and climate change, and mitigating the impact of population growth and development on the lake, we can restore and protect it for our benefit and that of future generations.

I want to acknowledge, as I mentioned earlier, that our government's commitment to Lake Simcoe and the protection of it is matched by the commitment of many partners who have worked on its behalf over many, many years. They all took part in the process to help us develop legislation to protect the lake in the best way possible.

I think of the LSEMS process that has been going on with the conservation authority in the Lake Simcoe area for at least the last 20 years. I think of all of those individual groups, such as the Ladies of the Lake and many of the other groups that have been formed to protect Lake Simcoe. They have done an awful lot of the spadework; they have done an awful lot of the work that is required and that brings us here today.

I want to thank all of those individuals and municipalities, conservation authorities, scientists, residents, cottagers, businesses, farmers and environmental groups and others who offered us the benefit of their insight, experiences and opinions, as well as the aboriginal communities, whose teachings and traditional indigenous

values encourage the work of protecting, defending and healing the earth, for providing their unique perspective.

I also want to thank the Minister of Natural Resources, my seatmate here, together with her ministry, because they provided invaluable contributions to the process as well.

I can tell you, hundreds have responded to the discussion paper, attended workshops and forums. I can remember attending two of these myself, one in Barrie and one in Newmarket, that were attended by literally hundreds of individuals.

I also want to thank all those who commented on the draft legislation which has been posted on the environmental registry.

If the bill is passed, I urge all of these partners, all those individuals, organizations and stakeholders, to remain involved. Protecting Lake Simcoe will be a collaborative effort that will occur over many years. It will require the hard work, diligence, co-operation, of all of us and, yes, also financing.

Bill 99 has been reviewed by the Standing Committee on General Government, and over the two days of public hearings we heard many positive comments, as I talked about earlier.

For example, Anne Golden attended. She's a cottager, and she's also a member of the West Oro Ratepayers' Association. Of course, the members of the House will know her as one of Canada's leaders in the public policy arena and as president and CEO of the Conference Board of Canada. She called Bill 99 "enlightened" and said that the government is doing the right thing with this legislation. She noted that, if passed, the bill would protect the lake from being destroyed by inappropriate land uses.

Erin Mahoney, the commissioner of environmental services for the regional municipality of York, said, "The region would like to commend the province for its very proactive approach to protecting Lake Simcoe."

Claire Malcolmson of Campaign Lake Simcoe, which is a coalition of 40 local groups, thanked our government for introducing the act and saluted the non-partisan nature of the effort to save Lake Simcoe and its watershed.

I would like to thank all of these individuals.

I have a number of other quotes here that I think will add to that as well.

For example, Environmental Defence, when it came before the standing committee hearings on Bill 99, stated: "We are overjoyed that the government is going to take action, as it has done in the greenbelt and elsewhere, to create world-class legislation to protect this threatened yet still magnificent resource."

Ontario Nature, in another comment that was made before the standing committee, stated: "As a partner in Campaign Lake Simcoe, Ontario Nature would like to applaud the Ontario Ministry of the Environment "for the introduction of the Lake Simcoe Protection Act. This act is a tremendous positive step in protecting this beautiful lake and the regional economy at its heart. It also begins to recognize that what happens on the land determines what happens to our lake."

Earthroots, in another comment made before the standing committee, stated: "I'd like to say how encouraging it is that the government has taken this really critical progressive step of introducing legislation for Lake Simcoe. We're really enthused that the Ontario provincial government sees the incredibly urgent need for affording meaningful protection to this vital watershed."

The Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, at the same hearings, stated that it wanted to congratulate the government on its leadership on this important issue.

Finally, Conservation Ontario stated, amongst other things: "I would like to acknowledge the government's steps toward legislating a watershed protection plan. Conservation authorities are in full agreement that the best way to protect and restore the ecological health of the Lake Simcoe watershed is through an integrated watershed management plan. This approach takes into consideration all the activities taking place on the land within the surrounding watershed which may impact the lake itself. It draws on the best available science,"—and I want to underline that: We've used the best available science in coming up with the plan—"which has been and will continue to be provided in large part by the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority."

These were just some of the comments that were made during the committee hearings.

Again, I also want to thank the committee members for their thoughtful consideration of the bill—members on all sides of the House. We have made amendments that I believe make a strong proposal even stronger. Let me just highlight a few.

In a motion introduced by our NDP colleagues, we have amended the reporting timelines. Previously, the minister was required to report on the results of monitoring programs or objectives achieved under the protection plan "from time to time." This has been amended to say "at least every five years." We've made amendments to Bill 99 to clarify the continuing role of conservation authorities in the protection and management of the watershed. One amendment makes it clear that conservation authorities are included with municipalities and other local boards in coordinating policies related to the Lake Simcoe protection plan. Another adds the Conservation Authorities Act to the list of examples of provincial legislation upon which the plan would build, thus responding to concerns that it not overlap with existing legislation or programs.

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I have referred to the Lake Simcoe protection plan throughout these remarks. But as you know, and as I stated before, Bill 99 is enabling legislation that will require the province to develop a comprehensive plan to protect and restore the lake. My ministry has been developing this long-term protection strategy with the support of two highly respected committees established by our government.

The first is the Lake Simcoe science advisory committee, which was set up to provide advice on the latest science on how to improve and protect the lake. I under-

stand that this committee has met on at least half a dozen occasions—I have had the opportunity to meet with them at least twice myself—and we have benefited tremendously from the scientific know-how and advice they've given us with respect to developing the plan.

We also have the Lake Simcoe stakeholder advisory committee, which ensures that any proposed policies reflect the broadest range of perspectives, while still remaining practical and realistic. This is a committee made up of some 20 individuals, with whom I have met as well, who I believe have met at least half a dozen times as well and who provide the broad range of interests that individuals or organizations may have with respect to the lake, from developers to farmers to tourist operators to environmentalists to ordinary citizens as well.

Members of both these committees have made an invaluable contribution over the past several months. I sincerely thank them, and we look forward to a continuing productive relationship in the future.

If Bill 99 is passed, we will be in a position to post a draft protection plan for consultation. We would also hold a series of workshops and forums to gain additional public comment. We hope to have the protection plan finalized as soon as possible thereafter.

Our government has committed \$20 million over four years to support Lake Simcoe. We realize that much more is needed and will be there at the appropriate time. These funds will be directed to protection measures, to promote better stewardship practices on farms and to support ongoing research and monitoring. In fact, several research projects are already under way, which look specifically at improving Lake Simcoe's water quality. For instance, the Phoslock pilot project, led by the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, is studying how this clay-based product could potentially be used to reduce phosphorus entering the lake, including that from the Holland Marsh. We look forward to seeing the results of this and other studies.

I want to end by recognizing that while the need to restore and protect Lake Simcoe and its watershed for its own sake is clear, it is also important in a broader context. From fishing and agriculture to boating, tourism and recreation, Lake Simcoe is directly responsible for hundreds of millions of dollars of local economic activity each and every year. In fact, environmental protection is closely linked to economic growth and prosperity across the province. No one would choose to live, buy or invest in an area where the environment is degraded. As we work to attract the best and brightest to Ontario from around the world, we must continue to protect our water and all of our resources from harm so our natural environment remains the attraction and matter of enjoyment and pride that it has been for so long.

We must also recognize that while Ontario has been blessed with the incredibly valuable resource of water, we, quite frankly, should never take it for granted. It is not an unlimited resource. Our water is under threat from climate change and from pressures of growth and development. As a responsible government, we must take

responsibility for its management and use in the same way that we commit to its good health, cleanliness and safety.

Bill 99 responds to these issues and, if passed, it will allow us to restore and protect Lake Simcoe and develop a gold standard of sustainability that could safeguard watersheds and ecosystems across Ontario. I mentioned earlier that we have worked closely with the aboriginal communities as well, and in particular, in this case, with the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, on the proposed legislation and protection plan. I've been struck by their understanding of the inextricable link between people and the environment. They clearly understand that what happens on the land affects the water, and that what happens on the water affects all of us, and we agree.

If passed, Bill 99 would allow us to do what needs to be done to bring Lake Simcoe back to good health, now and for the future. By protecting these water resources they will help ensure the health of our communities, our people, our economies and the quality of life for our children and their children for years to come. I therefore urge all members in this Legislature to support this legislation so that we can get on with building the actual protection plan.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. I'm pleased to recognize the member for Oakville.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It certainly is a pleasure today to rise, and as parliamentary assistant to the minister, I'm pleased to join the Honourable John Gerretsen in support of the passage of Bill 99, the Lake Simcoe Protection Act. We all know that we live in a province that has a large number of rivers and lakes—it's what we are famous for—and while we're rightfully known for the vast water resources we have, it would be a mistake for anybody in the province of Ontario, including the politicians, to take any of that for granted. It's an issue that affects us all. Water and the issues associated with protecting that water are complex and very wide-ranging.

I've had the opportunity on a number of occasions now to visit Africa, and as we all know, that is a continent that is experiencing tremendous hardship related to drought and the displacement of many hundreds of thousands of people from land that actually was once arable and very productive. Here in Ontario we are incredibly blessed. We turn on a tap and what comes out is clean, safe drinking water. We know we have to protect and restore the freshwater resources we have in this province, and by supporting Bill 99 you are going to help to do that at Lake Simcoe.

In the case of Lake Simcoe, some 350,000 Ontarians depend on that lake for both their livelihood and their clean water supply. It's a lake that generates almost \$500 million a year, and that's from agricultural and recreational interests. Outside of the Great Lakes themselves, Lake Simcoe is the largest body of fresh water in southern Ontario. You'll find, if you look, that more than 30 rivers end their journey in Lake Simcoe. The lake itself provides water for eight communities, including the

larger communities of Barrie and Orillia, where we know we can expect growth to continue into the future. If you look, you'll see that the wetlands, the agriculture and the recreational waterways are part of a very large, dynamic ecosystem that forms the watershed.

The latest data we have tell us 33 of the species that depend on Lake Simcoe are currently at risk. Phosphorus levels in the lake are at a point when they are taking up much of the dissolved oxygen that is needed by the cold-water fish that are a large part of the lake's recreational attraction.

It's obvious to all that the lake is in trouble. Something needs to be done. We cannot just sit by and hope that the lake's going to repair itself; that simply isn't going to happen.

1400

Lake Simcoe's problems have been receiving a lot of attention for the past 20 years. Many of you in this chamber would be familiar with the Lake Simcoe environmental management strategy. This is a volunteer group that brings together all levels of government, regional stakeholders and First Nations communities, and they all work together to find ways to protect and restore Lake Simcoe. In preparing for this legislation, we consulted with and received input and advice from these groups, from other municipalities, from businesses, from cottagers, and from our own Ministry of Natural Resources as well as from other ministries.

Earlier this year, we appointed the Lake Simcoe science advisory committee and we worked very closely with the stakeholder advisory committee. These committees have provided us with their best advice on the ways that we can work to restore the health of the Lake Simcoe ecosystem.

We also initiated an aboriginal engagement process in December. That's to coordinate the input and advice being received from Ontario's aboriginal communities, particularly the First Nations who live near or on or depend on the lake itself. Bill 99 seeks to strengthen the already successful partnerships we have established in this regard, and what it does is provide a monitored and well-coordinated effort.

In keeping with the recommendations of the Lake Simcoe environmental management strategy working group, Bill 99 includes a proposal for the creation of two advisory committees. One is the coordinating body and the other is a science advisory committee that's going to ensure that the best science is applied to this process at all times.

The Lake Simcoe Protection Act will also allow the government to increase support for ecosystem planning. It's going to pursue separate studies for both agricultural uses and urban uses. It's going to continue the scientific monitoring that is taking place, and it's going to contribute even more to resources that involve public outreach and educational programs. As promised by our Premier earlier, the processes and reporting on this will be regular and transparent.

Last June we allotted \$20 million to help start protection measures, and they are going to promote better

stewardship practices on the farms that depend on Lake Simcoe, farms like those, for example, that comprise the Holland Marsh. We've got about 2,000 farms in the area. The agricultural importance of the lake is simply not in question. These farmers have already put into practice some 300 environmental improvement projects.

Phosphorus is a key water quality concern that should be of concern to all of us. We need to find ways to reduce it, and we're going to look at the most innovative and the best science to help us do that. In fact, this summer I personally had the pleasure of attending at Lake Simcoe a demonstration of what is called Phoslock. The results look very promising, and we're already investing in further studies. This is why we've invested a quarter of a million dollars in this exciting project to study its effectiveness, and we're looking forward to seeing the results.

This investment was also part of our recent investment of \$850,000. Some of that money is going to research. Some of it is going to projects that focus on protecting the watershed, as well as to smaller groups that are passionate about raising public awareness of Lake Simcoe. We know that this money has been well spent.

In my visits to the watershed this past summer, I've seen first-hand how dedicated, how passionate and how committed these groups are. I believe it's our responsibility as a government to encourage and to add to the momentum that they themselves have created. If we're going to ensure a sustainable future for Lake Simcoe and indeed for the province of Ontario, government, business, environmental groups and researchers need to work alongside communities and with all our stakeholders.

Supporting the efforts of 23 local municipalities that share the lake is simply essential in our efforts to turn things around. Bill 99 calls for more environmental programs that would work with local initiatives to raise awareness and to assist in any and all steps that are being taken to restore the lake or upgrade systems that have the potential for improvement. Scientific analysis and best available technologies are also critical components.

The plan we're developing will take an innovative, science-based watershed approach to ensure that development and activities around the lake are indeed environmentally sustainable.

We're in the process of improving what we already know about limiting contaminant levels. We've already established strict interim limits on phosphorus levels into Lake Simcoe from local discharge points. We have the committees already in place that are advising us about the best ways to restore and protect the lake's ecosystem, and to date, the results are very encouraging.

But now, today, it's time to take the next step. The passing of Bill 99 is going to allow us to begin public consultations on the proposed Lake Simcoe protection plan. Bill 99 provides the framework that we need to move quickly to protect Lake Simcoe and provide a gold standard for similar acts that may be required around the province of Ontario for other watersheds, for other lakes and for other ecosystems.

I support and I encourage others to support this bill. I think it's working to restore and to protect Lake Simcoe. It's a priority of this province; it should be a priority for us all. It's a challenge we simply need to address, a challenge that's put before us because Lake Simcoe is an essential resource. It's a large part of Ontario's natural heritage and certainly worth the effort of all parties it's going to take to preserve it for generations to come. We have expressed our commitment in words, we've expressed our commitment in actions, and we plan to continue.

Sustainable and healthy communities are the key to Ontario's future, and nothing is more fundamental to that basic success than water. There's a strong agreement by all parties on the need to develop a comprehensive, long-term, science-based plan that's going to protect and restore Lake Simcoe.

If passed, Bill 99 is going to allow us to develop this plan and take the necessary steps forward on behalf of the people in the watershed and the people of Ontario. I sincerely hope that all members will offer their support to this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I am very pleased to rise to speak for a few moments in support of Bill 99, the Lake Simcoe Protection Act, because after all, it was my colleague Mr. Garfield Dunlop, the member from Simcoe North, who brought this matter forward in a private member's resolution which was argued in this Legislature in November 2006. Being a long-time resident of Simcoe county and being quite familiar with the lake, he understood its strategic importance and the need to preserve it for future generations. I'm very pleased to be speaking in favour of it.

From my view of it anyway, there are three very basic goals to be achieved by the legislation. One, of course, is to protect the water supply for future generations, to make sure that those people who depend on it as a primary source of clean drinking water will be able to do that through the preventive measures that it's going to be bringing in. There's also the issue of the businesses that depend on Lake Simcoe being a viable lake that is in good shape for the sports and recreation facilities, for the fishing that goes on there and for the many people who have cottages and homes there and all the other spinoff businesses that are dependent on that as well.

But I think probably the most important one when we're talking about such matters in the Legislature is the fact that it is part of our natural heritage and it does have a very important ecosystem. It also has very important natural features that are part of our heritage, that we should be thinking about preserving for future generations so that they will have the opportunity to live, work and play in the area.

We should be using this example as we move forward and think about all of our lakes here in the province, to make sure they are maintained. We need to be mindful that we're only stewards of these natural features for the

time we are here, and we want to make sure they're here for generations to come.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: In the absence of my colleagues from the New Democrats, I will take this time slot as MPP for the riding of Barrie.

The House probably is well aware how delighted I am that the McGuinty government is moving forward on bringing in new laws and measures to protect Lake Simcoe through the Lake Simcoe Protection Act, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Minister of the Environment, John Gerretsen, and very much the parliamentary assistant, MPP Kevin Flynn, for their hard work and dedication to this cause. My colleague has spoken to me a number of times of his visits to the watershed, to the area, telling me of the people he has met and the insights he has gained and the co-operation he has received, and has kept me very apprised of all that he has done to make sure this is an exceptional piece of legislation.

1410

As has been said, Lake Simcoe is a critical resource and a great treasure to the people who live and work and play in the city of Barrie. Kempenfelt Bay, which is that portion of Lake Simcoe on which we sit, contributes hugely to our quality of life. People from Barrie indeed care very much about Lake Simcoe and about the quality of water and the sustainability of the ecosystem. Public information sessions that were held—it seems some time ago, but I guess it's not all that long ago—in Barrie were very well attended. I know Minister Gerretsen and I were there at one in the east end and he commented to me that he had not attended for some time such an excellent session with such a variety of groups and individuals from a number of backgrounds, and about the very positive manner in which they contributed to the process. So indeed we have listened and the government of Ontario has listened, and we now move forward in our development of the protection plan.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker and the House, for this opportunity to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some comments to the speeches made by the Minister of the Environment and the member for Oakville on Bill 99, which is An Act to protect and restore the ecological health of the Lake Simcoe watershed. I'm certainly supportive of protecting Lake Simcoe. I know that we'll be hearing from some PC members; the member for Simcoe North has had a private member's resolution on this issue before, and the member for York-Simcoe is also very much affected by the Lake Simcoe watershed.

Speaking for the riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka, I would like to ask for help in our area as well. The member for Oakville talked about how impressed he was with the pilot project to do with Phoslock. That has come up in my riding as well, to do with the Sturgeon Bay

area, which is just north of Parry Sound on beautiful Georgian Bay, part of the UNESCO world biosphere reserve, and certainly a spectacular part of the world. Sturgeon Bay and one other body of water in Parry Sound–Muskoka, Three Mile Lake, have both had problems with blue-green algae. Certainly the Sturgeon Bay association in the Pointe au Baril area have specifically asked for help with the possibility of using the Phoslock process in Sturgeon Bay to try to clean it up, so I would ask the government to not forget about the beautiful coast of Georgian Bay. I certainly want to see work done in Lake Simcoe, but, speaking for my constituents, I would also like to see some attention paid to Sturgeon Bay and Three Mile Lake in the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? Okay. We'll return to the government. The member for Oakville has up to two minutes to reply.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It certainly is a pleasure to reply and to hear some of the positive comments that we're hearing.

What people have said on a number of occasions is that the work we're doing on Lake Simcoe is work that we're hoping can be translated to the rest of the province. It's an example of how we can protect a watershed, it's an example of how we can approach some of the problems that have plagued that watershed, and we're hopeful that this is going to begin a process that is going to allow this to be turned around. So it's great to hear the support from all sides of the House for this, because I think that not only is this an exercise and a process that is going to be a successful example of how we can grow sustainably in a watershed, but it's also going to provide some learnings that we'll be able to apply to other areas of the province of Ontario in an innovative and very exciting way. So while all the focus may be on the Lake Simcoe area and its watershed right now, I think those of us who have a more visionary outlook on sustainable development—and that certainly is a lot of the groups we were able to work with within the Lake Simcoe watershed—will see this as an example of what happens when groups are able to work together, when the levels of government are able to work together and when everybody brings their best ideas to the table with the overall intent being that we're going to clean up what is really a natural treasure. It certainly is a provincial treasure but, when you look around the entire country, I think you'll see few places that are as beautiful and as well used and utilized as Lake Simcoe.

It's really encouraging to hear some of the support from all sides of the House. My thanks for the co-operation that I've received from members of the other party and certainly from all the community groups—the hospitality I received when I visited those areas was second to none. These people deserve our support.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I appreciate the opportunity to take another look at Bill 99, the Wayne Gretzky bill, as

it's known in some quarters; also referred to as the Lake Simcoe act.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I call it the Mike Harris second majority bill.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I'll be sharing some of my time with that gentleman who is actually speaking right now, the gentleman who introduced this concept into the Legislature in 2006. As it was just mentioned, Garfield Dunlop, the MPP for Simcoe North, pretty well got the ball rolling based on his lifelong experience with not only the lake but the watershed and adjoining issues.

I do note, however, that today's debate time, as it has progressed, has been indicative a bit of the slam-bam-ram-it-through approach. We were notified of this debate, I think it was just late Friday, something like 3:30 Friday afternoon, and we've seen a bit too much of this during this fall session. I think of the WSIB legislation. That was speeded through for members of this government to get in the good books with some of their cronies. The pre-budget hearings—we are in a very sticky economic situation right now. To ram through pre-budget hearings before Christmas, when they're normally held throughout the end of January and on into February—I'm concerned the kinds of things we hear before the finance committee the week before Christmas may not have much relevance next April, when the budget kicks in. So I think it's very important that we continue to get this right and continue with the debate.

Because the notification was late Friday for this third reading debate, I wish to commend Rob Willett in my office, who worked on Saturday and Sunday; Debbie Osske worked over the weekend. Work was previously done under some of these last-minute deadlines, which to me indicate poor planning. Bobbi Ann Dwornikiewicz in my office, and also David Isern, had to jump into the fray with very little time, just before the clause-by-clause deliberation before the committee.

I understand that we can likely expect this law to be on the books, as it were, by the end of this day. So I'm not sure what good it really does to, in a sense, continue to debate this afternoon a piece of proposed legislation that appears to be already a done deal.

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I wish to remind people of work that was done over the past year or two by John Tory in the form of an eight-point plan for Lake Simcoe. It included a number of issues:

(1) Funding: an immediate call for \$12 million to be disseminated over two years, matching that federal government funding to support a Lake Simcoe action fund to speed up the cleanup.

(2) to develop a new governance structure for the lake, again, working with stakeholders;

(3) to create a Lake Simcoe charter;

(4) to increase and streamline funding for not only water but also waste water infrastructure for projects that impact Lake Simcoe, impact the Lake Simcoe watershed and other areas across the province;

(5) to end the dumping of primary sewage into our water;

(6) to hire more conservation officers to protect the lake and rebuild the Ministry of Natural Resources so it can better maintain not only the health of this lake but other water resources across Ontario;

(7) to conserve more green space with a land conservation challenge fund. Again, it would apply to areas like Lake Simcoe;

(8) to invest in better GO train service through the Lake Simcoe area, again, to reduce pollution, the dust that is stirred up by highways—and anybody who parks a vehicle at Queen's Park is well aware what their vehicle looks like at the end of the week with the dust that gets blown in. Primarily, it would be from the Gardiner Expressway, the 427 and the QEW.

So, better transit, a positive impact on smog, a positive impact with respect to climate change—all issues that have been discussed, all issues that threaten the health of this particular lake.

I just wanted to reiterate a few of those points. I feel they're very important to keep in mind as we continue to discuss the bill that's before us today. I will say, at least the McGuinty team did allow the general government committee to hear from the public. That was on November 17, and with that in mind, today I hope to provide some insight on what we learned during that time since we last discussed this in the committee of the whole—it was in this House—time spent in committee consulting as well as hearing from those who were impacted, either directly or somewhat indirectly, by the nature of this proposed bill.

As you will hear, a number of familiar themes were raised during these public submissions, including governance, funding, shoreline buffers, protection from lawsuits, committee representation and composition of committees, the enforcement of regulation and the transition to regulation. It's important to reiterate right from the get-go that there are 350,000 people living in the Lake Simcoe watershed. There are another 250,000 people on the way, we're told, over the next 25 years. Ontario Nature testified before the committee. They indicated a doubling of the human population in this watershed in the coming years. I raise this as a warning of what we have in store with regard to the human footprint that will be unavoidable, no matter what kind of Lake Simcoe protection plan this government conjures.

That said, I would like to share some of the recommendations that we heard during committee hearings. The input from delegates was significant. Just in the last hour or so, we can tell it's had some impact on some of the deliberations.

First up: the Innisfil District Association. This is a ratepayers' group with about 700 members. They had a very thorough report in which they highlighted a number of concerns. The recommendations that they brought forward I noticed were reiterated—they came up time and time again in a number of other groups. I don't know whether they all hired the same consultant; obviously there was an awful lot of communication amongst the various deputants, and that's a good thing. Innisfil

district's number one concern was lack of transparency and how transition regulations are going to work under the new legislation. They stated: "If people continue to see sprawling, unsustainable suburbs sprouting up in Simcoe county over the next 10 years, they're not going to believe your government has addressed the environmental health issues of Lake Simcoe." This group felt that government had not adequately anticipated the response to this apparent contradiction, adding there was need to "set strict development regulations accordingly." This group also saw a lack of clarity when it came to the plan and with respect to shoreline development restrictions, stating that they must apply to residential redevelopments, resort development servicing, and include a shoreline restoration plan.

The Innisfil group also pointed out concerns with regard to alterations of the shoreline, as it pertains to the Big Bay Point project development, stating that the project represents a situation of a developer being allowed to dig an inland lake of 30 acres to accommodate a 1,000-boat-slip mega-marina which connects to the lake. This would seem to not only pose a further threat to the deteriorating condition of Lake Simcoe, but also to be unjust and unfair.

I'll continue their point: "The government must provide protection for its citizens from strategic lawsuits...." These are the SLAPPs, strategic lawsuits against public participation. They go on to say, "Lawsuits outstanding against our members, lawyers and other critics of the Big Bay Point projects now total over \$90 million." This act is "meaningless unless residents can speak out openly against projects that threaten the environment. This government should move quickly"—this is one of their recommendations—"as Quebec has done, to guarantee that citizens be allowed to participate free from the chill of developer lawsuits."

As I recall, either this presenter or one of the presenters somewhat furtively turned around and looked at the audience and indicated that he was subject to a \$1-million lawsuit. I found that a little disturbing. We had these hearings just a few days after Remembrance Day, and we all understand why people stepped up and fought on our behalf. It was to have those kinds of freedoms: to be able to not only assemble, but also to speak up without the kind of intimidation that was conveyed to us by some of the people who came before the committee.

This brings me to some comments about this SLAPP program. SLAPP stands for strategic lawsuits against public participation. The province of Quebec introduced legislation against this kind of intimidation. In fact, our legislative research person assigned to the Standing Committee on General Government provided some information on these kinds of lawsuits. "SLAPP" is a term used to describe lawsuits initiated by plaintiffs, typically corporations, to stifle criticism of their actions. Such lawsuits are often filed in environmental and land disputes against members of the public or public interest organizations. The legislative researcher made a number of points for us, for our information.

(1) Very few of these SLAPPs end up going to trial. However—this is understandable—critics charge that such suits are typically filed to divert the defendants' resources and shift the venue from the political to the legal realm, where the plaintiff enjoys the advantage.

(2) Most of these SLAPPs plead multiple causes of action, such as defamation and interference with contractual relations.

(3) Defendants and other critics may become intimidated and cease their political interventions as a consequence.

1430

The issue of intimidation is somewhat near and dear to my heart. I represent Haldimand county and Caledonia. I have witnessed a significant amount of intimidation over the last two and a half years and, I might add, going on 200 years with respect to the land dispute around Douglas Creek Estates subdivision, Six Nations and the Caledonia area. In fact, as a member of this Legislative Assembly, I might notify you of this: I've been named in a multi-billion dollar lawsuit. My name is on a lawsuit, something in the order of \$260 billion, because I choose to speak out with respect to land disputes. It would clear out my pension plan if I had one—I guess that goes for everybody in this room.

Now whether you're named in a million dollar lawsuit or in a \$260 billion—I have trouble getting around that figure and so does my wife, because she opens the mail—I find that does intimidate one; it does prevent one from freely and openly speaking out on some of the things that we believe in and speaking out, in my case, on behalf of the 107,000 people I represent. I sensed in the room during those committee hearings—at least one deputant indicated they felt intimidated to speak out on behalf of the 700 people or so people that they were trying to represent with respect to the Lake Simcoe watershed.

Going back to Quebec, on June 13, 2008, Quebec's Minister of Justice—and I should check my notes: it indicates here he introduced a bill that was titled Bill 99. Now that's awfully coincidental, however, the long title of this Quebec bill: An Act to amend the Code of Civil Procedure to prevent abusive use of the courts and to promote freedom of expression and citizen participation in public debate. That bill amended Quebec's Code of Civil Procedure to allow the courts to dismiss a court proceeding deemed to be abusive if the claim or proceeding "is clearly unfounded, frivolous or dilatory"—I'm not sure; I assume that "dilatory" means to delay or to obstruct. What is a dilatory? I throw that across to the members opposite.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Dilatory is like John Tory.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Again, I'll have no delay or obstruction at this point—"or in a conduct that is vexatious or quarrelsome. It may also consist in bad faith, in a use of procedure that is excessive or unreasonable or causes prejudice to another person, or in a perversion of the ends of justice, in particular if it operates to restrict freedom of expression in public debate."

This Quebec bill allows the courts to order the payment of a provision for costs, declare that a legal action is abusive, condemn a party to pay the fees and extrajudicial costs of the other party, and order a party to pay punitive damages. That was from Legislative research; I thank them for that. Apparently, in Quebec Bill 99 received first reading, was sent to committee in October; however—and I'm afraid we in this House know how this story plays out—it died on the order paper when the provincial election was called on November 5.

Back to some further comments from the Innisfil group. In their submission they go on to state that the Lake Simcoe coordinating committee that is called for in section 19 as well as the science committee are both considered to be very essential advisory bodies. However, they have no real powers. That aside, the group advocated that environmental groups should be well represented on the Lake Simcoe coordinating committee, and to use their words, in order to provide "transparency, co-operation and public credibility." Essentially, they felt that public and environmental interests are under-represented in the governance provision as it was written. Later, they also reported concerns with section 26 being too restrictive on wildlife and healthy habitats, feeling that areas of land adjacent or close to the shoreline of Lake Simcoe should—and again I'll read part of their submission, "land within a 100-metre distance to the lake, shoreline, ... tributary of Lake Simcoe, as defined in the plan."

I have a bit of a problem with a set distance in metres. It may be okay for a municipal park, for example, but not so much Mother Nature. Mother Nature doesn't really operate on these kinds of boundaries and restrictions. If there was a very large marsh based on a very significant aquifer, 100 metres isn't necessarily good enough. Again, it referred to the shoreline of Lake Simcoe, and I just think there are still some people who may not think in terms of watershed. We're talking about the watershed, not just the lake, not just the shoreline. I know that would be of interest to the 12,000 or 14,000 cottagers who may ring the shore, but we're looking at the watershed in its totality, hence the value of having the involvement of a group like the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority.

But going further, the group argued for permanent protection of natural area, including meeting habitat guidelines, and pointed out, rightfully so, that forests filter contaminants from the land. Their report indicates that the Innisfil wetlands area has been drained over the years, and currently the municipality has only about 15% to 17% forest cover. That's well below the guidelines from Environment Canada.

So, just to summarize their presentation—and I focused more on this group than some of the others, because they did pretty well cover the watershed—I would collapse it into five major points: They feel the act should apply equally to marinas, resorts and residential developments; it should have an early effective date; not allow significant shoreline alteration, and buffers should be a

minimum of 100 metres; targets for phosphorus, surface impermeability and natural cover must follow the advice of the scientific advisory committee; and there should be adequate and sustained funding for the plan.

We also heard from another group, EarthRoots. They told us that the Lake Simcoe Act, like any piece of environmental legislation—there are certainly areas that need some more work. They stated their anticipation, and I quote, “problems with the soft, ambiguous language. We have legitimate concerns that the use of the word ‘significant’ insinuates a level of threat that is open to interpretation, which, therefore, could be used to disregard threats not deemed to be ‘significant.’” Then they advised, obviously, that the language be strengthened.

Again I quote, “In particular, the committee’s 100-metre naturally vegetated buffer recommendation ... must be followed.” The greenbelt’s 60-metre buffer is insufficient for effective wildlife corridors.

I don’t recall if they were referring to a 100-metre wildlife corridor just around the rim of the lake. Wildlife corridors would be necessary, obviously, in the thousands of kilometres of streams that drain into Lake Simcoe. Having travelled the area several times this summer, I think it’s an area that still has fence rows. If they can be allowed to continue to expand in shrubbery and trees—again, I grow cash crop, and we find if you can give up eight rows of corn, maybe 16 rows of corn along a fence line, you have over time a wildlife corridor. Much of it seemed to be focused just on the shoreline. We have to think about the whole watershed.

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They added, “Since the Lake Simcoe Protection Act is modelled on acclaimed laws that already exist in Ontario, notably the Niagara Escarpment plan and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, it is imperative that our government learn from the mistakes and omissions from these pieces of legislation.”

They questioned the real priority being placed on hydrological integrity when water-intensive operations such as aggregates and golf courses are allowed to flout the rules surrounding the Ministry of the Environment’s permit-to-take-water process. They indicated that Newmarket and Aurora have been experiencing declining groundwater levels for over 10 years. They called for a moratorium on any new or expanded golf courses in the greenbelt and recommended, “It is ... essential that the government address the urgent need to protect this vital watershed and prohibit any new golf courses or any new aggregate operations in this protected area.”

I don’t recall hearing from gravel pits, sand or stone quarries. I don’t recall any testimony from golf courses. That concerns me, when legislation gets put on a bit of a fast track.

Another group, the Federation of Ontario Cottagers’ Associations, made a number of recommendations. They called for equal representation of all stakeholders, strong enforcement of regulations and real consequences for offenders. They want a funding plan for sustainable planning and implementation over time.

Another group that presented—it’s referred to as BILD, which stands for Building Industry and Land Development Association—is an association that is the result of a merger of UDI, the Urban Development Institute, and the Greater Toronto Home Builders’ Association. They have 1,500 members and they’re affiliated with the Ontario and the Canadian Home Builders’ Associations. The report was presented by Joe Vaccaro. It’s a fairly detailed submission, outlining the rigorous land use planning regulatory regime that has already been developed in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Vaccaro went on to list just about every piece of related legislation you could think of, including the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, the Oak Ridges moraine conservation plan, the Sustainable Water and Sewage Systems Act, the Nutrient Management Act, the Planning Act—including Bill 26, the Strong Communities (Planning Amendment) Act, Bill 51, the Planning and Conservation Land Statute Law Amendment Act—as well as a number of provincial policy statements, the Ontario Heritage Act, the Greenbelt Act, the greenbelt plan, the Places to Grow Act, Places to Grow, the growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe, the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, the South Georgian Bay-Lake Simcoe source protection plan. The intent there, I think, was just to indicate the kind of legislation that they end up dealing with during the course of their business.

Then they listed all the local plans and policies that are involved in land use decisions more locally—the County of Simcoe Growth Management Study, the Intergovernmental Action Plan for Simcoe, Barrie and Orillia, Ontario regulation 170/06, the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, the draft Simcoe area growth plan, the official plan review for Simcoe county, Planning for Tomorrow, which was done in York region, Growing Durham from Durham region, and Liveable Peel, Peel region.

Then they got into some more recent technical studies that they are involved in, including: the Watershed Report Card in 2008—it was a report on Lake Simcoe—the Assimilative Capacity Studies for the Lake Simcoe Watershed and Nottawasaga River; the Natural Heritage System for the Lake Simcoe Watershed; the Lake Simcoe Basin Wide Report, written in March 2008; the Benthic Macro-invertebrate Sampling and Analysis of Lake Simcoe; the Lake Simcoe Hydrodynamic and Water Quality Model; Assimilative Capacity Studies: CANWET Modeling—they just wanted to remind the committee of a lot of the rules and regulations that they are involved with. They wanted to also remind the committee of the Premier’s statement that the new act, if passed, would not apply to existing approvals, respecting the long-held principle that land use planning, legislation and regulation should be applied on a go-forward basis. Obviously that’s very important to that group; they support the stated purpose of the bill, underlining that through the development applications process, the BILD members, in their view, have made significant, substan-

tial investments in infrastructure and restoration efforts which in turn have played an important role in the continued rehabilitation not only of the lake but also of the watershed.

They registered their concern; in their view, the act does not reflect the work undertaken by LSEMS, the Lake Simcoe environmental management strategy. He went on to say, "LSEMS is comprised of representatives from the Ministries of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Environment, Energy and Infrastructure, Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Natural Resources, as well as Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Environment Canada, the regional municipalities of York and Durham, the county of Simcoe, the cities of Barrie and Orillia, the towns of Bradford West Gwillimbury and Innisfil, the townships of Oro-Medonte and Ramara, the Chippewas of the Georgina Island First Nation and the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority." It suggests to me that what we're attempting to do today with this legislation is in many ways to create a very large umbrella over many, many diverse and sundry players.

He also indicated—this was the BILD presentation—that through LSEMS, "BILD, along with the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, Ladies of the Lake/the WAVE and Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition, have been engaged through the LSEMS working group and through various partnerships," indicating that phosphorus levels have been reduced from more than 100 tonnes per year down to 67, and the water quality has seen some level of improvement: "Over the last eight years, as both public sector, institutional, tourism and population growth have increased, the LSEMS program was successful in lowering the phosphorus levels in Lake Simcoe." They do recognize that there is much more work that needs to be done, and the LSEMS structure provides "a valuable blueprint for future work."

They also recommend "that the legislation be amended to reflect and acknowledge the need for the scientific committee to outreach and consult with the scientific practitioner community" and those who actually work in the watershed. They did caution, "Section 18 is silent on the membership and composition of the scientific committee, providing no ministerial rationale for those appointments nor identifying the necessary expertise required to serve" on the committee. They recommended the amendment to section 18 regarding the membership—again, essentially asking for representation of the scientific practitioner community that serves Lake Simcoe and also calling for membership drawing from experts in the areas of municipal water, waste water treatment, storm water management and sustainable development.

They go on to say, "Without some amendment to the current committee structures, the concern is that the decisions made by the committees become disconnected from the local authorities and the practical realities in the watershed."

Funding came up: "Bill 99 does not address funding. In fact, the bill, as currently drafted, does not compel the

provincial government to provide funding of any kind. Respectfully, I would say to the provincial government that the plan cannot be downloaded on ... local municipalities. BILD has recognized and applauded the government for uploading services from the municipalities. Funding from the province is critical in dealing with existing threats to the lake and what is currently in the ground and in the water."

1450

In their conclusion, BILD recommended that the act and the plan clearly articulate that they do not apply to existing approvals.

Another group, Environmental Defence, came forward, and again we were informed of the spectre of SLAPP: strategic lawsuits against public participation. Environmental Defence felt these kinds of suits are serious and a real threat to continued citizen-led advocacy to protect the lake. They went on to say: "It would be a cruel and perverse outcome to launch ... new rights and responsibilities to protect the lake, in a community ... paralyzed by the sight of neighbours ... having to pay millions ... in cost awards and legal" fees.

The Ladies of the Lake submission touched on a number of similar points—points we've heard so far today—and highlighted their concern with transition regulation. They stated: "To prevent development that is absolutely contradictory to the intent of the plan, and other new inappropriate developments that might sneak in before the plan goes through, why not make the Lake Simcoe Protection Act and plan effective from that December 6, 2007, date so no more development that might be harmful to the lake can take place?"

They also echo the sentiments with respect to governance, and I quote: "The Naked Truth Citizens' Action Plan" devotes "a whole section to ... this. 'Now is the time, to integrate the scientific and research endeavours of the NGOs, governments and institutions, to communicate and collaborate ... as a means of developing awareness and buy-in.' Sections 18 and 19 of the act call for the creation of a Lake Simcoe science committee and a Lake Simcoe coordinating committee. These new bodies are crucial," this group stated.

It went on: "Paragraph 6 of subsection 19(4), regarding the appointment of committee members, says the Lake Simcoe coordinating committee should include 'other interests, including, in particular, environmental and other interests of the general public.'"

They remind us that the LSEMS working group "recommended that there be equal representation from industry, the public and government.... And when it says that industry or business should be included, we should keep in mind that business is a lot more than the development industry," as they stated in the committee.

The Ladies of the Lake's report to the committee concluded with the following: "Fortunately, this great lake and beautiful watershed is not completely ruined yet, but the rampant me-first thinking in all sectors has got to change if Lake Simcoe is going to be an integrated eco-model, where the economy and the environment are in sync with each other."

We heard from a group called the Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition, a group that started the WAVE program. As they indicated, they worked with 6,000 homeowners—6,000 lawn owners—to reduce the use of fertilizers containing phosphorus, a great idea. Personally, I have never put fertilizer or any pesticides or herbicides on my lawn. I have a farm, and I really question why you would put fertilizer on a lawn. It just makes it grow more, and you have to mow it. In my view, why encourage it?

One of the coalition comments centred around designated policies in the act. The act distinguishes between designated policies and those that are not designated. The way the act is presently structured, a designated policy has a much higher status than a policy that is not designated. They went on to say that the requirement that a decision must conform with a designated policy provides strong protection for giving legal effect to designated policies, while the “‘have regard to’ requirement, with respect to other policies” affords no protection at all. This distinction, they mention, occurred in a number of sections of the act. They suggested that, given the extent to which the plan is comprised of policies that are not designated, the plan would be meaningless because these policies will have little effect. They asked, “How can this plan be enforced?”

These groups raised questions: Did this government introduce the wrong legislation? Should it have been closer to the greenbelt type of legislation or the Oak Ridges moraine type of legislation, given the tremendous migration of people projected to go into this area? This is an environmental bill. To what extent can it handle a migration of people into this watershed which, according to Ontario Nature, will double in the next 25 or 30 years?

I’ll just move through this; I know Mr. Dunlop is eager to speak to this as well. We heard a submission from Councillor Alison Collins-Mrakas, of York region. She advised us that York region is the “fastest-growing region in the entire country.” I don’t know whether she saw that as a positive or a negative, but to that end, she reminded us that while this is a necessary plan in Bill 99, it’s also a costly one and will require considerable resources. She raised the question, “How will it be funded?” I asked the same question, and I’m sure that many of the municipalities that are in or partly in the watershed would ask that same question. As the councillor appropriately stated, “Objectives of the plan are moot if there’s no financing in place to implement” the plan.

Another concern was with regard to water extraction, and made reference to the science advisory committee, where it stated—I quote that report: “The amount of water taking and its effect on the hydrology in the watershed is expected to increase and requires more study.” It was noted that at present, “Water extraction for water bottling does not appear to be an issue,” but future demands are expected to increase. “Taking into account the variability resulting from climate change” and other stressors, “we can anticipate a supply-and-demand conflict” with demand trumping supply. Again, this is an

environmental bill. It’s not going to deal with population growth and the attendant demand on drinking water and the pressure from waste water.

The final submission: I want to make mention of the Holland Marsh Growers’ Association. I recently purchased a 1953 Chev 1100 three-ton stake truck. It was originally used in the Holland Marsh to haul out crates of produce, and more recently to haul tobacco down my way. The plates on it are 1968. I’m in the process of trying to get this monster running. The Holland Marsh Growers’ Association represents 10,000 acres within three municipalities. It’s an organization going back to 1923. Their spokesperson, Jamie Reaume, reminded the committee that farmers have long been recognized as stewards of the land and “environmentalists,” long before the word was used. I know that applies to our farm property. Over a number of generations, we have put in several hundred acres of trees on our land in southern Ontario.

1500

Mr. Reaume’s concern: Farmers “are now being named as the sole target for the reduction of phosphorus levels in Lake Simcoe, despite the fact that the city of Barrie is well over its capacity level for development and, during peak capacity times, dumps raw sewage into the lake system....”

Over the past two decades, farmers, as I think many well know, have reduced their inputs—their usage of fertilizer and pesticides, for example—by more than 50% and will continue to do what is best for the communities of which they are an integral part.

Mr. Reaume went on to say that this House must be reminded that we already have a Nutrient Management Act in place, we already have the Clean Water Act. This is an add-on to that kind of legislation.

I could go on. We had a number of excellent presentations, not only from the Lake Simcoe—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: You already went too far.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I’ve just been told I went on too far.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Keep going. Use the hour up.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I think I have 15 minutes left.

I also heard from our separate umbrella organization, Conservation Ontario.

I’m just going to ask Garfield, did you want to do 15 minutes?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: No, never mind.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Will you get a chance tomorrow? I don’t think so, with this group.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Don’t worry about it. Keep going. Use the hour up.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Okay.

Conservation Ontario is the umbrella organization that represents all of Ontario’s conservation authorities. The spokesperson here was the general manager, Don Pearson. He submitted a number of comments on the organization’s behalf.

In partnership with their member municipalities and the province of Ontario, conservation authorities manage

watersheds in which more than 90% of Ontario's residents live and work. We know in parts of northern Ontario, with crown land, you don't have the management through a conservation authority.

Conservation Ontario is on record as supporting Bill 99. They spoke to a number of specific aspects of the proposed legislation which they believe will strengthen the act: First off, acknowledge and reinforce the important role of the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority—and I agree with that one—and avoid duplication of regulation and effort. They did acknowledge that the tools available to the conservation authority are not adequate to address issues such as future growth, and hence the need for the proposed Lake Simcoe Protection Act.

Mr. Pearson also stated that conservation authorities are in full agreement that the best way to protect and restore the ecological health of the Lake Simcoe watershed is through an integrated watershed management plan.

He went on to say that Conservation Ontario supports the concept of a provincially mandated watershed plan for the protection of Lake Simcoe and the ultimate approval of such a plan by the province, but recommends that the proposed Lake Simcoe Protection Act respect and acknowledge the watershed management agency role that is mandated through and to the conservation authorities, through the Conservation Authorities Act.

Mr. Pearson also strongly noted that they had a serious concern that the Conservation Authorities Act is not noted in subclause 4(j)(ii), especially given the obvious parallels between the intent of the proposed legislation and sections 20 and 21 of the Conservation Authorities Act. They went on to say that the plan must avoid duplication of existing programs, such as watershed planning. We received a number of recommendations from Conservation Ontario: "We recommend"—I won't get into the numbers but subsections of the Conservation Authorities Act as provincial legislation that provide protection for the Lake Simcoe watershed, and that the Lake Simcoe protection plan be built upon, in their words:

"We understand that it would be inconsistent with ... procedural rules to amend ... section 27" of the Lake Simcoe act, which allows the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulation that designates, for the purposes of the act, the participating municipalities for the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority.

They went on to say the effect of such regulation "is to provide the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority with jurisdiction over the entire watershed of Lake Simcoe, but ... only for the purposes of the LSPA." So they strongly advise that this be accomplished through an appropriate amendment to the Conservation Authorities Act.

Accomplishing the expansion of the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority under this Conservation Authorities Act would remove potential ambiguities regarding the conservation authority's jurisdiction and provide for the necessary power to levy the municipalities

for the implementation of the full watershed management plan. As well, it removes the administrative and decision-making inefficiencies, essentially creating, they propose, a Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority board for the purposes of this particular bill that we are debating.

The second recommendation that the standing committee unanimously supports is that Bill 99 delete a number of subsections and make a number of amendments. The standing committee supports, again, a number of other recommendations. I'm not going to get into clause-by-clause right now in the House on that one.

We heard from another municipal councillor by the name of Virginia Hackson. Ms. Hackson is a third-term councillor for the town of East Gwillimbury in the regional municipality of York. She had been a member of the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority for eight years and is currently in her second year as chair. She took time to address three key issues which she believed would strengthen the proposed act, acknowledge the role of the conservation authority and avoid duplication of effort.

"(1) ... build on the protection of the Lake Simcoe watershed, include reference to the Conservation Authorities Act. Section 20 of the Conservation Authorities Act allows an authority to establish and undertake, in the area over which it has jurisdiction, a program designed to further the conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources other than gas, oil, coal and mineral" resources.

She recommends—again, I'll try and summarize some of this—a number of amendments to increase the efficiency of watershed processes as they relate to the conservation authority, vis-à-vis the proposed Lake Simcoe act.

We had a submission from Deborah Beatty, past president of the Lake Simcoe Conservation Foundation and a member of the board of the Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition. She made the point from her perspective at committee that, "As the pending legislation reads, there is a serious potential for duplicating existing legislation and adding another level of bureaucracy." She concluded her presentation by stating that the public would like to have a more meaningful participation in the decision-making. She was opposed to the current structure, where LSEMS, in her words, "are all government" officials. She also reminded the committee that we need more legislation that complements but does not duplicate some of the successful measures that are now in place.

1510

In speaking with the one farm representation that came before the committee—we do have a nutrient management framework; we have the Nutrient Management Act. There was a proposal put forward which may include nutrient trading or offsetting. We know that section 30 of this bill would amend section 75 of the Ontario Water Resources Act to establish water quality trading. We all know about the—well, maybe we all don't know about a deal that was signed this past summer by the province of Ontario with respect to air emissions trading. I do try and

explain to people in the coffee shops—or I ask people, “Are you aware that the province of Ontario has signed a trading deal with the state of Nevada?” It does take people aback. Some people indicate to me that that makes about as much sense as signing an air emissions trading deal with the state of Arizona, and I then inform them the province did that as well, and also with California.

Again, there has been work done on emissions trading. We know the very successful program a number of years ago, a deal that was signed by President Ronald Reagan and the Prime Minister of the day, Brian Mulroney, on emissions trading, which was a very successful program in alleviating the impact of acid rain. We now have much discussion with respect to carbon dioxide emissions trading. Again, one would hope that can be done at the federal level. It is confusing when you have the state of Arizona signing an agreement with the province of Ontario. It’s very difficult for people to understand just how that works and how much Ontario pays Nevada or how much Arizona pays Ontario.

I would hope that this legislation underlines the importance of further voluntary tools. You can’t mandate everything. I think of tools such as the stewardship program. I think Jamie Reaume made mention of that. We have an indication that this government will be allocating funding through the farm community to deal with phosphorus loading, and hence try and ameliorate some of those problems with high phosphorus coming into the lake from the tributaries and hence less oxygen and less herring, less coldwater fish resources.

Pilot programs: There is a track record, certainly in the farm community, with best management practices and performance monitoring. The research is there with respect to monitoring. I sincerely hope that the intention of this legislation goes with the carrot rather than the stick. As far as the carrot, there is an excellent program; much of it has been pilot-tested in my home county of Norfolk. This is the ALUS program. ALUS stands for alternative land use services, essentially a system based on society, through their taxes, through government, paying landowners and farmers for the services they provide in the form of an environmental good. This is something that is obviously not delineated within this legislation, but something that would serve the Lake Simcoe watershed well.

Funding was not specified in this proposed bill, and we all know that any plan to preserve and protect Lake Simcoe is going to cost a fair bit of money. I read a discussion paper where it was estimated it would cost something in the order of \$163 million to implement measures to reduce non-point sources. There are a number of programs that may be utilized to fund some aspects of this plan. Again, I go back to an excellent program from the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ontario stewardship program, which, working with landowners and real people, has had a very significant and positive effect on the environment.

Thank you for the hour, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I’m delighted to be here to speak about the Lake Simcoe act. Specifically, I had a chance to meet with my colleague the MPP for Oakville, Kevin Flynn, who serves as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment, a job I had in the last mandate. So we had a great chat, and we were talking about the history of this bill.

To try to set for the House some context, one of the first things we did as a government, when we formed government in 2003, was to pass the “You spill, you pay” act. That’s how it was referred to, the idea being that if you spilled something in the water, you had to prove that you hadn’t done it. If you couldn’t prove that, you would have to pay the cost to help the people downstream, who had to pay for the cost up until we passed that act.

We followed that up with the Clean Water Act, another piece of seminal legislation that I was involved in. The best thing about the Clean Water Act was that it enshrined the concept of the stewardship fund.

I say to my friend from Haldimand–Norfolk, who spoke for an hour on this bill, that I have met with the people from his riding, the people in Alice, the people behind that. As a matter of fact, they came to my riding and made a presentation—the idea that it’s very important for us to have the concept that Lake Simcoe, as one of the largest freshwater bodies of water in North America, is a shared responsibility and that we want to encourage stewardship of that fund, and that when we have two great requirements of society that are in conflict—the need to have sustainable development but also to have a sustainable environment—we have to have people come together.

So I want to commend my friend the parliamentary assistant, who has been working with Minister Gerretsen on this bill and trying to find the right balance so that we can have Lake Simcoe for future generations and also have a prosperous economy, something which is even more important today than it was last year. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Further questions and comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I’m pleased to rise and comment on some of the points which the Progressive Conservative critic for the environment, Toby Barrett from Haldimand–Norfolk, has raised. I think it’s important that we are at third reading debate for Bill 99, although I must say that one of the roles that we in opposition can play is to anticipate issues and raise concerns, and I must say that over two years ago, on November 23, 2006, in fact, there was a Progressive Conservative resolution on this very issue.

I’m going to highlight one point which I think is very important when we discuss Bill 99 and moving forward. It says, “Recognize the development pressures that the Oak Ridges moraine and greenbelt legislation and Places to Grow Act have placed on the Lake Simcoe watershed.” To me, that’s an indication two years ago that the members of the opposition, and in particular our member from Simcoe North, were talking about the leapfrogging in development and what that is causing for communities

within Ontario, and that we have to be aware of that when we bring forward legislation, and, quite frankly, fund it appropriately. Bill 99 has an awful lot of value, but we need to put the infrastructure in place to ensure that it is successful.

I would hope, considering the current economic pressures that Ontario is under and that of course the Liberal government will have to face in the next number of months, that they don't simply table Bill 99 and the Lake Simcoe act and forget that they actually have to put some money behind the action.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I am very pleased to join this debate. I've already spoken on the Lake Simcoe act, in support of it, largely because my colleague from Simcoe North was a visionary in bringing this legislation forward. As my colleagues opposite will remember, he put forward a resolution in this House in 2007 because he was responding to his constituents. I am very proud of him for doing that. The fact that the government has adopted Garfield Dunlop's measures speaks volumes to his commitment to his community, but also to the fact that what he wants done is the right thing to do, and that's why the government has adopted his measures.

I just want to say that this is a very encouraging thing because as a private member, Mr. Speaker, you will know that people often say the initiatives that you bring to the Legislature will not go anywhere. I beg to differ because we see all the time pieces of legislation coming from private members on this side of the chamber that actually do impact law.

This bill that Garfield Dunlop first raised is now going to be adopted by the Liberals and we'll all support it. My colleague Sylvia Jones, through Bill 94, a revolutionary piece of legislation that would give children who are disabled more access to tax breaks through the RDSP, brought forward legislation that was adopted yesterday by the Minister of Community and Social Services. So Sylvia Jones deserves a big round of applause, along with Garfield Dunlop and, of course, John O'Toole, revolutionizing the way we deal with our cellphones in cars. Frank Klees has been on the cusp of street racing.

Good pieces of legislation come from this side of the House—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —and I'm really proud of my colleagues.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: In terms of this legislation, I'd like to thank the people, especially the Ladies of the Lake—they're the ones who really led the fight. They were the brave souls who worked and sacrificed and used all kinds of intelligent initiatives to bring this lake to the attention of all of us. They are the people who deserve the credit:

all the ordinary folks who care about the water they drink, who care about this precious lake.

Sometimes we don't do enough to thank our environmental grassroots organizations like that one organization that really went out of their way to fight for this kind of recognition. Our government listened to those people who care deeply, and we're proceeding with this type of protection.

This lake I think is typical of a lot of watershed areas in southern Ontario that need comprehensive, source-water, watershed protection. It's not just the lake itself but it's the 30-odd rivers and streams that flow into the lake that also have to be looked at, as this will be part of the comprehensive plan.

Having been involved to a little extent with this type of initiative, I know how difficult it is, but I think people are on the side of sustainable protection and reducing carbon footprints because that's what ultimately makes good environmental sense, good economic sense. These are precious resources that cannot be taken for granted, and this bill ensures that for generations to come Lake Simcoe will be a reservoir for wildlife, all kinds—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

Mr. Mike Colle: —of precious species that we need to protect.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Brant, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Speaker. Formerly Brant and now Haldimand-Norfolk.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Sorry, Haldimand-Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I appreciate the feedback. I'm looking forward to the third party and to speeches this afternoon from other government members because we have to be assured that this proposed bill, if it becomes law—it may get pushed through today; I don't know—has to be something more than window dressing.

I know that the member for Dufferin-Caledon mentioned the importance of funding this type of program. The federal government has what they refer to as the Lake Simcoe Clean-Up Fund. There's \$30 million there to accelerate the restoration of Lake Simcoe through nutrient reduction, fish habitat restoration—I understand that the sport fishery within that lake does not naturally reproduce itself. I know that bait fish are not reproducing, because the Lake Simcoe guys come down to get bait fish from Port Dover harbour on Lake Erie to take up to Lake Simcoe for the ice fishing—it's somewhat of an artificial arrangement. There's federal funding for increased science and ongoing monitoring of the lake.

We have to go beyond just a piece of legislation that may put a plan on top of a plan—we heard the warnings about duplication and overlapping legislation and overlapping plans. We very clearly heard the concerns about the tremendous increase in population growth on this lake. Garfield Dunlop has set the bar very high. I just hope this bill is up to the challenge of dealing with that very high rate of population.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate this opportunity to speak, and having had laryngitis when this came before the committee, I appreciate the ability to speak again. To those who showed tremendous patience last week while I squeaked away at the microphone, and to the Chair, who very honourably read out my amendments, most of which lost—I think all of them lost—I'm appreciative of the aid.

Speaker, as you know, Lake Simcoe faces profound challenges. It's a lake that has been subjected to substantial development. It's a lake that is dealing with overloads of phosphorus, leading to algae and weed growth. It's a lake where the natural fish stocks are in decline—there are 65 endangered species. There are more and more beach closings because of *E. coli* contamination.

This is a beautiful piece of Ontario that is under profound threat and, frankly, those in the community, those environmental groups in Ontario, those in local environmental organizations around the lake have for years been pushing very hard both to defend the lake and to ask the government to step in because, in the end, it's their power that's necessary to ensure that this lake lives, thrives and provides recreation and sustenance to hundreds of thousands.

Ladies of the Lake, Campaign Lake Simcoe, Environmental Defence—David Donnelly is here in the east gallery and has personally been deeply involved in all of this. He in fact is currently dealing with a strategic lawsuit against public participation problem, something the member from Haldimand-Norfolk spoke about earlier. All those people have fought hard for a long time. Notwithstanding what they had to say in their deputations, when they called for changes to the bill to make it far more effective, they've called on parties to support the bill so that at least this tool, with whatever limits it has, is available for protecting the lake.

I, for one, am willing to support the bill although, as people well know, and I squeaked it out in committee, there are substantial changes that I think are going to be necessary to make the bill truly effective. I worry profoundly that the bill, as presented and as amended, is not going to do the job, and that is a huge burden on this government.

There are a number of amendments that were suggested by the citizen and environmental groups that came forward, and those amendments were ones that I put forward: first of all, and I think most importantly, the recommendation that any proposal for development that had not gotten all of its approvals in place, I think by December 6, 2007, should not have been allowed to go any further. In particular, there's one development, Big Bay Point, that would have been caught by that.

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In the course of the hearings I had a chance to talk to one of the political staff working on this bill. I understand only about 5% of the shoreline of Lake Simcoe is still in its natural state, which is quite an extraordinary thought,

that almost 100% of that lake has been transformed by human hand over the last few centuries. It's no wonder, given that reality, that one sees declining indicators of health for that body of water—no wonder at all. So when one puts forward a resolution to try to stop further damage, I would say that that's a reasonable resolution.

We had Anne Golden speak to us—well known in Ontario, well known in this Legislature. I asked her, specifically, if this bill were amended with a resolution to say, "December 6, 2007, if you don't have all your final approvals in, you're not going forward," politically, legally, is that doable? Given her considerable knowledge and experience, I think her answer is a credible one. She said yes, you can do it. You'll get some heat but you can do it and, frankly, you should do it. That amendment died and I think that the government is going to have more damage to deal with because those projects go forward.

There were recommendations from local groups, from environmental groups, that there be a 100-metre shoreline setback to preserve wildlife corridors, and frankly, as well, to have as much natural vegetation, trees and so on as possible as a way of buffering the lake from the impact of development around it. That amendment was defeated.

I have to ask, if you are going to restore this lake, if you don't have adequate buffers, how are you going to have natural systems that will protect the waters of the lake? How will you protect the animals and the fish that live in the lake? How will you ensure proper interaction between shore and body of water? Without that 100 metres, I don't think you're going to have it. That amendment was defeated.

People came before us and said that, in this bill, the ability of municipalities to set stricter standards than the bill provides for is disallowed. This is a disturbing pattern. This was the case with the Pesticides Act. It wasn't reflected in previous legislation we've seen here around smoking. Generally speaking, municipalities have been allowed to set a higher standard for protection of human health, for protection of the environment, and I think in this case that's a mistake. I don't know all that went into it, but I have to say right now that giving municipalities the ability to set a higher standard is something that helps drive politics in this province.

The member for Eglinton-Lawrence has spoken before to this issue and pointed out some interesting cases in which the province has taken a lead, and he's correct, but I have to say that very often you will see municipalities take the lead, set a standard, and the province will follow afterwards.

I find it interesting to see what's going on in the city of Toronto right now with plastic bags. The city of Toronto is actually taking an initiative there that I think will reduce the amount of plastic bags that go into the waste stream. The initiative that was taken at the provincial level was far weaker. It was a voluntary program in which I couldn't detect a pulse that would indicate life in the years to come. What I saw was a very interesting photo opportunity. What the city of Toronto is doing in

negotiating with the plastic bag manufacturers and the wholesalers, the retailers, is actually concretely making a difference.

Here on Lake Simcoe, leaving with the municipalities their power to set a higher standard for protecting the lake, for protecting the environment, is in the interest of the province as a whole and the interest of every person who travels to that lake, every person who comes upon that lake and every person who lives around that lake. So again, I think the initial failure, inviting the bill to exclude the power of municipalities and then a failure to amend the act to protect the power of municipalities—that's a substantial shortcoming.

It was suggested to us in committee by a number of deputants that there should not be a process whereby unelected hearing officers could amend the protection of the lake. There are political decisions that rest on the political shoulders of ministers, Premiers and cabinets. Those political decisions should be left in the hands of those who can be held accountable for them. It was a mistake to write the bill that way in the first place, to cut out political input and accountability, and a mistake not to amend the bill.

Lastly, in terms of amendments, there's no question that if you don't enforce the act, it will be of no consequence. It will be an interesting piece of paper. People will get to wave it around. You will get to swat flies with it. In the heat of summer, you will get to fan yourself with it. But in the end, if left unenforced, it will simply be an interesting curio, something that schoolchildren will read about years from now when they trace the slow decline of Lake Simcoe. The situation we're dealing with is not as severe as that of the Aral Sea in the former Soviet Union, but you can see how a body of water, through multiple demands, can decline and ultimately become useless to those who live around its shores and who wish to travel to avail themselves of its natural wealth.

We are in a situation where we have a bill that is, in my opinion, flawed but potentially useful. It depends to a great extent on whether the government will enforce it and whether the regulations that arise will in fact put some teeth into it.

I can now say: Liberal government of this province, the fate of Lake Simcoe is in your hands. You have written this instrument. You have created it. You have said, "These are the powers we need to ensure that this lake lives and thrives." Well, make it work.

If you don't make it work, many will point out where you went wrong. I think what the citizens and the environmental groups had to say in their presentations made tremendous sense. They were asking for reasonable things to protect a body of water that hundreds of thousands depend on and, frankly, millions enjoy.

I want to go back to a point that was made by the member from Haldimand-Norfolk, and that strategic lawsuit against public participation. That I found an extraordinarily disturbing reality of what is going on politically in Lake Simcoe. I have had experience working

with citizens' groups organizing around difficult and contentious projects. I've had an interesting education in practical politics at the municipal and provincial level. It is very clear to me that if citizens and the lawyers who work for them stand to be subjected to huge lawsuits that may well strip them of their assets, their life savings, the ability to speak freely in this society and act within the framework of laws that we have put in place is profoundly diminished—profoundly diminished. If in fact people become fearful of exercising their democratic rights, fearful that should they speak out against a powerful developer or company they risk the kinds of legal penalties that many are now facing—let's set aside the penalties. Let's say they win their cases entirely. The cost and the effort of defending themselves in court, the anxiety of something like this hanging over you, that diminishes our democracy.

In the course of this whole process, my hope would be that the Minister of the Environment, who has seen this process—I have no doubt he has been briefed very thoroughly—will take it upon himself to talk with his colleagues and say, "If we're going to defend the environment in Ontario, we have to make sure that the citizens are defended so they can speak and speak freely." That is a tangential but vital lesson that's come out of this whole process.

I don't think I need to say an awful lot more. Others have gone into extraordinarily great detail. I think the essentials are this: The bill should go forward. I find it unfortunate—I think it's a substantial mistake—that it has not been amended in the ways that were suggested by citizens it and environmental groups. So be it. The Liberal government has it on its head to save or write off this lake. My hope is that they will be alert enough to take their responsibility seriously and save the lake.

1540

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I was listening attentively to the member for Toronto-Danforth and to his very cogent analysis of the bill and some of its weaknesses and some of its shortcomings, and I agree there are some. I just know that the government hopefully will continue to look upon this as a work in progress, really, because this is just a template in terms of putting that comprehensive plan in place. I think that's where it's incumbent upon all of us to ensure that this process continues to engage people in a meaningful way and that there are proper adjustments made as we go along, because this is the beginning of a very long-lasting initiative. That's the way I look upon it.

I certainly think that we have come a long way in Ontario. I can remember when I first started to talk about establishing a greenbelt in Ontario, and many people said, "Oh, you can't do that. What about property rights?" I said, "Most of the property is probably owned by the crown anyway." But we have a greenbelt now. I remember when I first started talking about the Oak Ridges moraine. People said, "Where is this marina up in Oak Ridges?" I'd say, "No, it's the rain barrel for all our

rivers and lakes, and if you contaminate the rain barrel with all that pavement and development up there in Richmond Hill, you're going to basically destroy our water sources." The public came onside. I can still recall one night in Richmond Hill that we had 2,500 people at a meeting asking to protect the Oak Ridges moraine. That's when the previous Tory government woke up and said, "Wow. Maybe we'd better do something about this Oak Ridges moraine."

I do want to again thank all the environmental and grassroots groups that have been involved—Environmental Defence, the Ladies of the Lake. As I said, they're the ones that usually lead, and then politicians start listening to them. That's why we have to keep our ears to the ground and remember that this is no one's property; it is everybody's property. It's everybody's water; it's everybody's lake.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I too rise, and actually to thank the member for Toronto—Danforth for his comments because I believe that at the end of the day, on balance, they were quite supportive, and he suggested some things that perhaps could improve the bill. I think, as with any major piece of legislation that makes the sort of change that's being envisioned by something of the magnitude contained in Bill 99, you would expect that you would have transitional provisions. This bill, to date, I believe has been a perfect example of how we should consult with our partners and how people who have what might seemingly be different opinions, perhaps—stakeholders from the agricultural sector, from the urban sector, from the environmental sector—have come together on this bill. To date, I think it's been a perfect example as to how legislation should be passed and how it should be carried forward in a co-operative sense. I believe that sense of co-operation is going to continue as we move forward and actually adopt the plan. I think we can't do that until it leaves this House.

It sounds like, from what I've heard, we're going to get support from every side of the House on this, and there have been some suggestions as to what should happen after that support is attained. I suspect we will have another debate as this moves forward as to what should be included in the bill and what shouldn't, but when you look at some of the groups we've been able to work with in the past—Environmental Defence, it's been noticed, Campaign Lake Simcoe, Ladies of the Lake, Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority—these are all groups that have brought their best advice to the table. I'm sure they're going to continue to bring that advice to the table as we start to implement what will be transition provisions that will see the enacting of this bill in the real world. Right now, it exists on paper and it exists I think in the minds of all of us here. By moving forward, by supporting this bill, we allow this bill to become real and to do the sort of things it was always envisioned to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? Seeing none, I return to the member for Toronto—Danforth, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to the members from Eglinton—Lawrence and Oakville for their comments.

There's one point that I wish I had mentioned previously, but now that I have a few seconds, I can mention it. In the course of the presentations by the citizens' groups, one thing they referenced a number of times was the commentary of the Lake Simcoe science advisory committee and the fact that they didn't see enough of that reflected in the legislation. In fact, in some instances the legislation seemed to diverge very sharply from what the science advisory committee had put forward. So I say again to the government, in this case, if in fact you've done a scientific analysis of the needs of the lake—what's necessary to make sure that it's alive, that it doesn't just become an algae- and weed-choked wet area, that it actually has coldwater fish, that it actually has a full range of animal life—then you should be paying very close attention to the science advisory committee's recommendations and you should be reflecting its analysis both in your legislation and in your concrete plan to go forward.

You have a huge responsibility on your shoulders. You cannot let a lake like this, a central part of southern Ontario, simply choke up, fill up with algae and weeds. You have to take concrete steps, and they have to be steps based on an analysis of the best science available showing what are the most effective steps that anyone would take to make sure the lake's future is protected.

So I'll close with that, to urge the government to go back to the scientific advisory committee's assessment and to make sure their recommendations are carried through.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I appreciate the opportunity to stand and debate today on what's happening with Lake Simcoe. I want to bring up a few points.

When we're looking at these things, I always try to ask—and in this particular bill it would be one of the key components. When we're making a decision, we need to ensure that we look to the future through the eyes of the children of today. What, effectively, I mean by that is that when we're making a decision, we have to ask what is going to be the impact on our kids or their kids, so that we can make sure we're making the right decision for the long term. Sometimes it's hard decisions that are being made.

There are a lot of things that are talked about. Lake Simcoe has a long and proud history in the province of Ontario, right from its name and its origins. You can talk about certain things, whether it's outhouses and the impact that outhouses can have on a watercourse—for example, if an outhouse is too close, there are the nutrients that flow through that outhouse, and of course if it's right on a watercourse, if there's a spring there it can flow right into the watercourse and cause contamination. So we want to make sure that a lot of those things are placed in proper areas to ensure that they do not do contamination or do minimal amounts of contamination.

Some of the other things that were mentioned: A number of members were talking about the municipalities having an impact or input into what takes place. I'm not always so sure that's in the best interests of a watercourse. The reason is that if there is a double lot, a 200-foot lot, the municipality can actually see two 100-foot lots there that have two facilities or two houses or two units on them that are taxable components. Where you have a single 200-foot lot, you have a minimal impact that's done on the watercourse, if it's in that area, because you cut in half, potentially, the amount of individuals or groups or organizations that will use those areas in making sure that the lot size has a specific impact.

I can remember a biologist by the name of Bruce Ranta asking, what is the maximum number of allowable units on a watercourse to process before one more just kind of breaks the camel's back? I'm not sure that we know. But if we're talking about municipalities and their input on deciding, I think that it's not always the right decision to make sure that, yes, we can get two units and tax twice as much, as opposed to a single 200-foot which would have less impact and would be better for the watercourse. Municipalities think in their best interests as well, and sometimes the tax revenues have a decision-making process that I'm not sure is always in the best interests of those water areas.

One of the other things that was mentioned was the 4,000 feeder streams that come into the area there. When you're talking about streams, part of the problem—most people don't realize this—is that the average stream requires a minimum of 36% coverage in order to maintain a cool- or cold-water status. What that means is that if there is not enough shade to cover that stream course 36% of the time, then the water has a tendency to heat up. When water heats up, it then flows into the main body and—guess what?—you can have as much as 10 degrees of temperature difference by what is flowing into that watercourse. What happens then? Bacteria start to process and move forward, and you have more contamination. That's why you get closed beaches etc.

1550

We talked about tree-planting, and the impact of tree-planting and what can take place there, but if you don't take into consideration the fact that you need a minimum of 36%—and I know that from one of our own streams in Oshawa that flow into Lake Ontario. It only has 12% coverage, but when you look at it you think it's a great and wonderful spot. The same thing takes place with Lake Simcoe. You want to make sure that those streams have a minimum of 36% coverage in order to maintain a cool- or cold-water status. Otherwise, you develop a warm-water fishery. Now we're seeing fish like bass coming into the Oshawa creek on a regular basis, as opposed to the natural salmonoid that used to flourish in there.

Some of the other areas, as well, use any dams or water-retaining devices. I use the example in Oshawa because I've worked on it substantially with a lot of groups and organizations, but the same effect can take place when you're dealing with places like Lake Simcoe.

What I'm talking about is a dam that takes place in the water. We have two: one at Camp Samac and one main one at a local golf course. The water sits in the dam, the sun comes out and heats up the water, the warm water rises to the top and then flows over the top of the dam. The difficulty is that you will find as much as 10 degrees of difference from the top-water temperature to the bottom-water temperature. So what we need to ensure, wherever possible, is that we have bottom-flow dams.

It was a simple matter of explaining this to the Boy Scout camp at Camp Samac, and every year, once the dam fills up, they open up the draw from the bottom and they draw the water from the bottom and that changes the water temperature, or maintains it, by as much as 10 degrees, as opposed to a top-flow dam. It has a huge impact on the watercourse and algae and all the other things that take place.

If we can look at some of those small things, like making sure that we plant trees along—and I know the Minister of Agriculture is in. We talked about a lot of access for a lot of farm communities that wanted to be able to water their cattle and things like that and, over time, there were a lot of trees removed. But if we can replenish those trees along the stream courses it would do a couple of things: one, to provide the shade, and the other aspect is the amount of erosion that takes place, and siltation. Siltation takes place in a number of ways, and that's because of the erosion. The rainfalls come down, then they have peaks and lows in the watercourse and it will wash away. As it washes away the dirt, it causes siltation in the streams, which covers all these spawning beds. If we plant trees along that, the root system within the trees provides the shade to keep the water cool, and they maintain the stream banks to minimize the erosional impact.

Siltation takes place in a number of other ways, and one of them is through the developments. That's why, when you're seeing a new development along an area, you'll see all these—they look kind of like fences. Actually, they're siltation retention devices to stop any of the rain when it comes down, when they're doing a development, from washing the topsoil right into the stream, which kills the beds. It's that siltation that chokes the eggs, or chokes those spawning beds, for a lot of the fish species that are out there or that should be out there.

There are a number of things that could be addressed in those specific areas to talk about, whether it's tree planting or whether it's bottom-flow dam feeds, to make sure that the watercourses take place.

I know the Minister of Natural Resources is in, but I'm surprised at one thing that was mentioned by the Minister of the Environment. My understanding was that there were some deep-water ciscoes that were starting to replenish themselves in Lake Simcoe several years ago. A deep-water cisco, for those who don't know, is like a herring. They are coming back now. They're a primary bait-fish that is fed on by a lot of the other fish in Lake Simcoe. That's a very positive sign, because the nutrients at the bottom—there was talk about oxygen depletion

and that's usually because, as the plants break down and dissolve, they eat up oxygen when they're breaking down. My understanding was that there are deep-water ciscoes that are now starting to appear, which is replenishing back into the lake, which is a great food source for a lot of the other target sport species, or game species, as they call them. This is really positive news for Lake Simcoe and a lot of the other areas.

One of the other things that they should look at is the need to think outside the box in a number of areas, and I'll give you a perfect example. Most people don't realize that with most two-stroke gas engines, the outboard engines, prior to about, oh, 1990 I think it is, 25% of the fuel will go back into the environment, just in the way the process works. The new outboard motors are far more fuel-efficient and don't contribute in the same fashion. But the older ones would spit out a lot of the fuel, and as much as 25% can go back into the fuel. This was verified through the alternative fuels committee that I had the pleasure to sit on in the past. Now the difficulty was that the fuel, when it got put back into the gas, used to sit on top of the lakes because the fuel was lighter. It caused a bit of a different problem, which wasn't that environmentally bad, in that it would evaporate into the air. When you were sitting there, you would see all those spots of gas or oil, it looked like, on the lake. And it used to evaporate into the air, so it wasn't necessarily contaminating the water.

The difficulty now is that they use an oxidizing agent in fuel to make it burn better. I think MMB and MTB are the two oxidizing agents that are used in fuel to make it burn better so it's more combustible and far more efficient in the engines. The difficulty with these two things is two-fold. One, it's a carcinogen and, secondly, it's heavier than water and separates from gas and will actually go to the bottom of the lake. Now guess where everybody's intake is when they're drawing in from the lake to take their showers or use in their cottages and the facilities there? They're drawing it in from the lake along with these other components that are separating from gas and settling on the bottom of the lake.

Ethanol is another one that would be far more efficient in lake areas. So one of the things that they could look at, or hopefully the committee will be able to try to address, is possibly any of these locations making sure that ethanol is the oxidizing agent in the fuels that are used in the lakes. That way you will minimize the carcinogens that are put in, that are heavier, that separate from gas and actually flow to the bottom of the lakes and accumulate—they're accumulative as well. So that's another thing that could be potentially looked at in a fashion that may be able to make sure that the lakes are far cleaner. Actually, anything that we can do to move the four-stroke outboard engine much farther—they're far more fuel-efficient, far less polluting in the environment. They are costlier and heavier, but they're much better for the environment, and any time we have the opportunity for opening lakes—I know that in the Kawartha Lakes, Highlands Kawartha park, one of the potential ones for

non-residents, potentially could have been anybody coming in that wanted to use a boat, so long as it was a four-stroke motor, would be given a permit to use it, in order to encourage the promotion of the far less promoting four-stroke engines out there. I know the member from Peterborough is listening very attentively, and hopefully—I'm not sure if he knew all these different aspects about fuel and aspects like that, but anything that we can do along that.

One of the other areas that is a bit concerning is that the people who own a cottage all want that pristine southern beach. They want to be able to have the proper exposure for the sun there and they like to have lots of sand and everything else. They have a tendency to cut down all the trees along the shorelines, and when they're doing that they're destroying the habitat in those areas. One of the difficulties is that spawning habitat—and if at all possible, yeah, it's nice to have a small section of sandy area so long as it is natural and self-occurring—

Mr. Mike Colle: Throw a log in the water; that's what I say.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Throw a log in the water. Well, actually that's something else I could talk about when we're talking about these pristine spawning areas. Over history—and I know one of the lakes up around the Wilberforce area—there used to be a lumber mill in the area and all the slabs were thrown off. I know in other areas up the Sault Ste. Marie way, when they were drawing the logs in, a lot of them sank to the bottom. They sit on the bottom and they create a bit of a good habitat for some spawning areas and protection areas for baitfish. Baitfish will accumulate around those logs. If you have an aquarium and just put a rock in there, you will always find that the fish will accumulate near the rock because there are several aspects of protection that are included in that. The same thing happens with the logging industry for baitfish areas to accumulate, and guess who feeds on the now-protected baitfish that have a chance to rear and get larger? That's the sport fish, which helps out the industry considerably. So when you are talking about habitat, we want to make sure that a lot of these shorelines maintain the current shoreline that is out there and ensure that the habitat or the spawning beds are well taken care of. If you notice, in the springtime you will see a bass or a perch protecting its nesting area. There's an actual nest right there and you always wonder why they are there, and that's just the species protecting and ensuring that it can grow and live.

We want to make sure that some of those habitat areas are well protected, and anything that we can do without destroying the shoreline, yet still having our little piece of paradise, so to speak—finding the balance points is something different. People want that pristine shoreline and beach, but we're not the Caribbean. We have a different kind of aspect here and we try to bring that little piece of heaven as much as we can.

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Some of the other aspects that need to be addressed:

A lot of the cottagers—sometimes I'm reluctant to say this, because you inform those who don't realize it—will

pour the antifreeze down the drains. You can get the non-toxic correct stuff to use, but a heck of a lot of them are using windshield washer fluid. I try to tell these people, "Look, when you're doing that, where do you think that fluid is going? It's going right into your lake. You wonder why there are no fish in that lake? It's because you're polluting it." "Well, it's only a little bit." "Yes, but if every cottage on this lake did that, you're polluting it far more than you can imagine and the impacts are far more negative."

We just have to watch how we take care of this earth because, as was mentioned earlier on, we're only given a short period of time to take care of it in the best way we can, and we have to make sure that we all look at it in a positive sense.

I know that the Minister of Natural Resources is in the House. What about fish derbies? I know there's no aspect of limiting and controlling the number of fish derbies and the impact on that. We constantly hear from cottagers, and I know, having had the privilege and honour to have sat in that chair in the past, that there were always the two sides: one wanted the economic stimulus in the municipality; and the cottagers were upset with it. There was an industry, before Rick Amsbury, bless his soul, passed on, that was working toward sanctioned fish derbies, whereby it would be a sanctioned derby in support of the ministry, with certain guidelines to ensure that the impact of those derbies was not overly negative on those particular areas in lakes. That might be something, as well, to consider and find out how we can find a balance.

I know the member from Eglinton-Lawrence had mentioned the Oak Ridges moraine and the impact on that. Some of the individuals here may not realize this, but the Oak Ridges moraine was a glacial aspect, where the glacier started to recede, and when they were pushing all the earth forward, it kind of stopped right there. What some people don't realize is that when the moraine was formed, all that earth that was stopped there by the glaciers actually pushes and forces pressure on the ground. Our watercourses in that area, actually being forced down, are then—if you just follow a line maybe a mile from the moraine on either side of it, that pressure then forces the water up, and you'll get a large number of springs coming up in those areas that then flow to the streams that would flow into Lake Simcoe. Those headwaters are some of the things we need to protect as well.

When we talk about the greenbelt or the Oak Ridges moraine, it was protecting the headwaters, to make sure that those streams were protected for a lot of the original species, which would be your speckled or your brook trout in these areas. There are some indicator fish, such as your crayfish as well as your speckled trout, which tell you how clean the stream is. They can kind of tell from that aspect the cleanliness of the stream, because they're very susceptible to pollutants. We need to make sure that we can keep these streams as clean as possible for future generations.

I think I've covered the aspects that I wanted to cover, and I very much appreciate the opportunity. I hope that

some people have gained insight on some of the things that we've looked at. Hopefully, that will be used in formulating decisions in the future, not just for Lake Simcoe, but when we're deciding what takes place with all the lakes in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: As you may know, in the House I have always listened attentively when the member from Oshawa speaks about our natural resources and our waterways, because he does have a great deal of expertise in this area and I learn a great deal when I listen to him.

I was just thinking that many people—I notice the Minister of Agriculture is here—are probably not aware that by naturalizing the creek beds and the riverbeds along the Humber River and the Black Creek, we actually now have brown trout in the Black Creek, right in the middle of the west end of Toronto, which the students from Chaminade high school took from Duffins Creek and brought over in the hatcheries in the school gym. Now there are brown trout back in the Black Creek after maybe 100 years.

If you want to see salmon going upstream to spawn, this September there were salmon this big, three feet or whatever, making their way up the Humber River, trying to jump through the ladders and the damming that takes place. They're right in the middle of the city of Toronto. We never saw that 30 years ago, because the Humber River, the Don, Lake Ontario, all of our rivers and creeks, were basically taken for granted, because there was a lack of education and understanding, like you mentioned with the antifreeze. We had all of these autobody parts stores and shops all along the west end of Toronto dumping all these parts and chemicals down into Black Creek and the Humber River. That has stopped now. You can bring back a river, you can bring back a stream, but it takes a lot of people working co-operatively and intelligently.

You have to know, because the manicured lawns we see in cottage country—why would you go to a cottage and spend the whole weekend mowing the lawn at the cottage? You could stay at home in the city and mow the lawn.

The critical thing is to naturalize your shorefront and make sure that it's in a natural state, with the natural flowers and the natural species that are there. Then you've got great fish, you've got cleaner water, and it's a much better place to be at in the summer, rather than being on your tractor mowing the lawn at the cottage.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to offer a couple of comments on the member from Oshawa's remarks today. Within our caucus, certainly, he's recognized as one of people who knows a great deal about the kinds of things—where we can only listen about the four-stroke engines. But I think that what was really important in the message that he provided for us was the economic

value of the lake and the fact that, as someone who has been involved very directly over many decades in looking at opportunities to support and advocate on behalf of the lake, people don't realize how much it actually contributes to the local economy.

I remember hosting a public meeting several years ago on Lake Simcoe, before it became a little more fashionable. We discussed, for instance, some of the issues around ice-fishing and the important role that the ice-fishing provided in terms of the economy of the communities around the lake and also the kinds of responsibilities that those people needed to exercise in order to be able to make sure that there were fish, supplies and business operators able to support that industry.

I think there's a balance here that we're all looking for, one that recognizes the intrinsic value of the lake itself, the economic benefits that are derived from it, and most importantly in terms of our debate, our responsibility to make sure that it continues to be protected and provide both the economic and intrinsic value that it has for hundreds of years—in fact, thousands.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Any further questions and comments? If not, I'll return to the member for Oshawa, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I appreciate the comments from the member from Eglinton—Lawrence as well as the member from York—Simcoe.

Certainly we've seen brown trout in a lot of the streams, but most people don't realize that brown trout can sustain higher temperatures. You'll find that brown trout can actually live in waters—I'm sorry, not the Celsius—of 76 to 78 degrees Fahrenheit, whereas when you talk about rainbow trout, you're looking at about a four-degree difference less, and then speckled trout below that. So the colder the water, the better it is for a lot of the native species. The rainbow and the brown trout were introduced into the province of Ontario. That's not a bad thing, as long as they're managed in proper ways. When you get to the speckled trout, and you see waters around 68 degrees, you know that you've got pristine water areas that will support the natural species from southern Ontario.

The economic value as well is very important. I know about the ice-fishing and there are a lot of derbies, and there are a lot of municipalities that do very well in supporting these aspects. And there are a lot of volunteer groups whether it's the Metro East Anglers and the OFAH working at Ringwood or—I'm attending a retirement tomorrow night of an individual, Roger Cannon, who worked very aggressively and very hard on behalf of the fishing industry, with governments of all stripes, to make sure that there is a balance out there, ensuring that we have future generations to make sure that all of Ontario can enjoy the great things, the various waterways, whether it's fishing, boating, sailing or whatever aspect of cottage and water life that people enjoy. Again, I appreciate the opportunity to speak today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

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Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm very pleased to be able to rise this afternoon in third reading of the Lake Simcoe Protection Act, Bill 99. Let me say at the outset that I will be voting in favour of this bill, as I have in its steps through the Legislature, but I do want to take the time to identify some concerns that I have with regard to the bill. Quite frankly, I'd like the government to receive these in the spirit in which they are presented, and these are indicators that I think need a little bit of work, recognizing that a bill has to have regulations that go with it. There's a great deal of reference by the minister that this is framework legislation. I'm suggesting that I have some concerns about where things go from here.

Certainly the very first one I would want to mention is the fact that while the minister has identified \$20 million over four years, when I listen very carefully to the comments that he makes in that regard, it seems to be on the issue of funding research. I have no problem with research. It's been one of the hallmarks of the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority over the past many years. In fact, they have an international reputation for the quality of work that they have done on the lake. But I would offer to the government that we need funding for projects as well. We need to see that if we're going to move the bar, we're going to raise the bar, we're going to provide amelioration—it's really expensive.

I know that very often the minister refers to agricultural lands and doing research on agricultural lands and the impact they have. Well, let me just remind you that every kilo of phosphorus that is removed from Lake Simcoe that comes from agricultural sources is 20 times less expensive than that which is taken out of urban runoff. I can't overestimate the fact that there's a difference of 20 times the cost for one kilo of phosphorus to come out of one source over the other. So let us not forget the complexity of this whole issue of runoff and with that complexity, frankly, the cost.

At the risk of repeating myself, I'm talking about a lot of complexities. The next one I want to talk about is the complexity of jurisdiction. Many of us recognize the fact that the watershed is a huge area, and it encompasses many municipalities. It encompasses two regional governments, as well as a county level of government and separated cities in Simcoe county, so you have a great many players. When I mention the cost of taking that kilo of phosphorus out of the urban areas, it's really hard when you're looking at areas that are several kilometres away from the lake—in places like Uxbridge, for instance—to be able to provide a really compelling argument about the importance of spending those municipal dollars on that phosphorus reduction in urban areas, particularly older parts of these municipalities. So you've got the complexity of jurisdiction and, with that, also superimposed by this bill is the complexity of existing legislation.

Let me give you an example of the kinds of overlay of legislation that exist in the watershed. First of all, there's section 3 of the Planning Act, then there's the greenbelt

plan, then there's the Oak Ridges moraine conservation plan, then there's the growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe of 2006. These are all pieces of legislation. When this bill was first introduced, I recall speaking to it and asking in a rhetorical manner whose legislation trumped whose, because obviously it's a very complicated area. The greenbelt covers part of the watershed but not all. It's the same thing with the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act and the same thing with the growth plan. So, in some places, you have all of these pieces of legislation and in others you have none.

The answer to the question is that this proposed bill will override all municipal official plans. That is somewhat unequivocal; that seems to be clear. But what happens later in the bill, in my view, is very disconcerting; that is, the bill says that with all of these pieces of legislation I've outlined, it is going to have to be determined which competing piece of legislation has a higher level of protection. In other words, this bill recognizes that there has to be a hierarchy of protection of legislation, but simply hands it over to the lawyers who are going to have to duke it out on which piece of legislation is going to have authority on a particular area, and to argue which one of them is going to provide the higher level of protection. I see the court looming in front of me when I hear this.

I do not see this as being part of what I would regard as our legislative responsibility. What we are doing here, when it isn't clear which piece of legislation is going to trump the others, is frankly creating a monster for the future. It's going to be left to consultants and lawyers to argue the case for one over the other. I see that as huge costs and bureaucracy and time taken, and then it ends up in a court.

The final thing I want to raise some concern about is the issue of governance. The bill has opened it, I think with justification from those people who have presented, who have demonstrated and certainly explained their frustration with the governance as it now is. But again I feel this is dangerous, in the sense that governance requires a level of accountability, a level of transparency. We're talking about public dollars here, and so we have to be very careful about making sure that whatever the governance model is, there's a very clear line of accountability. People are going to be very unhappy to think that their taxpayer dollars are going into an organization without that corresponding level of accountability.

While I indicated at the very outset that I will be voting in favour of this bill, and while I consider it to be something that is, in many ways, overdue, I felt it was very important to put on the record the concerns I have that I think have not been addressed by this piece of legislation. While it is a centrepiece for the government—as the minister describes it, a framework—a framework has to have some clear directions for people to work in. I think the complication of all those municipalities and upper-tier governments and separated cities that are all players in this—are all going to want to know

that their voices are going to be heard and that there is a level of accountability for their taxpayers. At the same time, the question of this very difficult way, I would argue, in so many cases, to determine which piece of legislation will have a higher level of protection—obviously that will vary according to where it is in the whole watershed—and the importance at the end of the day for the accountability we all have to the taxpayers of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? Further debate?

Mr. Gerretsen has moved third reading of Bill 99. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Third reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Orders of the day.

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IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR DES IDÉES D'AVENIR

Mrs. Dombrowsky, on behalf of Mr. Duncan, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 100, An Act to amend the Corporations Tax Act and the Taxation Act, 2007 / *Projet de loi 100, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'imposition des sociétés et la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Agriculture, Mrs. Dombrowsky, has moved third reading of Bill 100.

Would you care to lead off the debate?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'm sharing my time this evening with the member from Pickering-Scarborough East. I believe that member is—

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Right here.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: —and that member will lead.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: It gives me pleasure today to be able to rise and speak to Bill 100, the Ideas for the Future Act, 2008.

I note the clock is showing 59 minutes and change. Let me assure the members who are here that it's certainly not my intent to spend an hour speaking to this bill, in spite of the fact it probably deserves a full hour on the third reading leadoff. But I'm sure there are members with the last bill and others who don't need to have a full hour.

There's probably no better time in recent history, I would suspect, to be talking to ideas for the future than a time like this. What better time, given the economic climate that we're in, given the discussion we're having around the economy, given the talk about the restructuring that's going on, the need to ensure that existing industry remain strong? But, more importantly, increasingly people are thinking about the economic transition

that we in Ontario, we in Canada, we as citizens of the world find ourselves in.

I think that as time marches on there will be few left who will think of this as simply a shift in the economic structures in the workplace of the economies of the world. I think we'll look back on this and probably see it in the same way as those in the mid part of the 19th century may have looked at some of the changes that occurred with the Industrial Revolution. We may look at it as some of the changes we saw in the early part of 20th century as the automobile came into being and moved into its place of prominence and dominance as a public mode of transportation that all consumers had access to, or virtually all consumers. In the future, we'll look back at this time and recognize the structural changes that have occurred in the economy.

Thus, it is a particularly good time for us to be thinking about, talking about and legislating around ideas that will create those new economies, and that will create those new economies here in Ontario in particular.

I had the opportunity during the second reading debate to make some references to a device that we all use in this place today, a device that was thought of and developed out of research within the context of our university and business communities, and it's our BlackBerry. It's a device that a very few short years ago was merely a pager. Just a few short years ago, if you had said "a pager," that would have been a brand-new technology. Now we think of the device for paging information as something rather archaic. Now we have the devices that we wear on our hips, in our pockets, in purses, as something that we are connected to that allows us to do the jobs we need to do. Increasingly, that device, that technology, developed by RIM here in Ontario, is beginning to broaden itself beyond the business sector, beyond the elected sector, to the consumer sector in a very substantive way.

I was watching a bit of TV last night and a Christmas ad came on with a group of young people. The storyline was something to the effect that a young lady had found, tucked away, a gift that was wrapped and she opened it up and it was RIM's new flip BlackBerry Pearl device. She was chatting with her friends and she had this thing in front of her showing them all the wonderful things it can do for her. They said, "What are you going to do, come Christmas, when your parents find out that you've opened the gift?" She said, "That's not a problem. I'm just going to wrap it back up. I'll stick it under the tree and when I open it, I'll do the exuberant, 'Oh, wonderful. This is the best thing I've ever had in my entire life.'" They said, "Okay, that'll work"—the point being that it's now becoming a consumer device. It was developed here in the province of Ontario, and it's changing the way we communicate in the world.

Thus, we need to be thinking increasingly about new ideas, about new opportunities, and we need to provide the structure that encourages new ideas and new thinking and new investments.

There are those who want to contribute to those kinds of innovative technologies, innovative thinking, but they

need the support of government to make that happen. As we talk today here and as they talk in the federal government and the US about loan structures, about bailouts, about strategies to keep companies moving and in place, it's appropriate for us to think as well about how we can support new thinking, new ideas, and how we can support the tax structures around those to get the next generation of activity, the next generation of thinking, the next generation of product developed and into the marketplace in a fashion that we'll be able to use and take advantage of, to create jobs and keep jobs and create wealth within our communities. Thus, we need to talk about the opportunity to do that within a tax-structured basis.

We're talking about turning innovation into Ontario jobs by establishing high-tech companies that will, in turn, provide a boost to the economy. We're certainly going to want to see that happen. We're going to need it. As the Premier said, when Ontario comes out of this economic decline we're in now, we'll come out stronger. We're only going to do that if we have in place the structures that will allow this economy to thrive in the new environment we're going to find ourselves in.

We don't know what that environment is going to look like. None of us here know what that economic environment is going to look like in two years, in five years, in 10 years. I think we can be reasonably satisfied that it's not going to look like what it looks like today. It's going to look like something very different.

What we're into today economically is going to drive the thinking of an awful lot of people, the innovators, those who manage the business climate and those of us who are in the government mode, about how we can participate in the transition in the economic structures of this province and, ultimately, of the globe.

Bill 100 will provide a 10-year corporate income tax exemption for new companies that can turn homegrown ideas into those Ontario jobs and products.

Over the past few months, we've seen developments that are, quite frankly, unprecedented in the world. We wouldn't have thought at the beginning of this fiscal year that we'd see what's happening today. We've been experiencing enormous changes in a variety of sectors. Manufacturing and forestry are just a couple of those. We know it's not business as usual here. It's not business as usual anywhere at this point in time. We know from looking at what's happening in Detroit, in Washington, in Ontario, with the Big Three automakers—as they continue their negotiations to find ways by which they can continue to provide good jobs, high-paying jobs, skilled jobs, and develop new product and continue to function.

When I was driving in this morning, I was listening to the radio, and some of the commentary was around GM's efforts in bringing forward their new product over the next couple of years, the Volt, primarily an electrically driven vehicle. People are turning their minds to those things. People across the province and across the country are turning their minds to the new ways of thinking, new

ways of doing business and new products. We want to be a global leader, not just a provincial leader. We want to be a global leader. We want companies that are thinking about industry here in Ontario to be global leaders in that regard, and we need strategies in place to make that happen.

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We have a plan that we've referenced on a number of occasions, a five-point plan that we're consistently working to enhance and improve. Part of that plan is innovation, and Bill 100 speaks clearly to the need to innovate in universities, in colleges and in research institutes, where we can support the development of new and innovative ideas that can be brought to the marketplace and commercialized, and in commercializing those, create new jobs and new products within this province.

Now, the BlackBerry is a tool we wear, but who would have thought even just a few years before that we would have something called the Internet? We didn't create the Internet here, but we're certainly taking advantage of it.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Thank Al Gore.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Yes, and we could probably thank others. We could probably thank the US military, initially, but certainly former Vice President Al Gore was a leader in identifying the importance of the Internet and how it could develop in the form of the World Wide Web. We have companies, innovations and activity, and university and college development, that are now dependent on the introduction of that structure not so many years ago.

We continue to want to not only innovate but provide opportunities for tax-incenting companies and corporations to invest in Ontario and to continue their investment. Bill 100 does exactly that in providing corporate tax exemptions for a period of up to 10 years for companies that are developing and commercializing new products as a result of research done here in Ontario.

We can't just innovate; that's part of it. If we take another initiative—I mentioned the five-point plan; I know I digress just marginally, but I think it's worth referencing some of the other investments that are important in getting us through the period we're in and supporting this economy on a going-forward basis. Certainly our investments in infrastructure are a big part of that.

The Premier, in question period the other day, was making specific reference to some of the infrastructure initiatives, more than 100 major construction projects in this province at this point in time, whether they be our hospitals, court facilities, colleges, universities, roads or bridges. In referencing things like our hospitals and court facilities as infrastructure projects, each of those, as they are up and running, are going to need to have new technologies to make them work effectively. The Durham consolidated courthouse, with which my friend from Oshawa is very familiar, is going to be a very substantial project, with video conferencing capacity to assist in not having to bring prisoners from one location to the court

at a given point in time. Doing some of that by video conferencing will ease the process.

Video conferencing is something that is relatively new as well, and one would expect the technology for that to dramatically change over the next 10 years. I don't know what it's going to look like; I doubt anyone here does. But I would speculate that what we will see in the video transmission of information will be dramatically different in 10 or 15 years than it is today.

For those who were watching the presidential race south of the border just a few weeks ago, as I expect most of us in this Legislature were, one of the major channels—I can't remember which one, and I won't try to guess—was doing some holographic imagery where they actually had their newscaster placed with a blank screen behind them but could have them appear in 3-D within the context of everything that was going on. It's a very interesting technology, somewhat experimental from the media standpoint, but I think we'll look back on those kinds of things 10 years from now and say, "That's fairly commonplace."

Ontario should have the opportunity to be part of developing those kinds of new technologies. Bill 100 is one way in which we can encourage, through business tax-incenting, researchers to look at those kinds of opportunities in technology at our universities and colleges, and research institutes to bring those products to commercialization, to bring them to the marketplace and find a niche, whether it's a niche in video conferencing strategies in Ontario, in Canada or throughout North America or elsewhere. So the opportunities exist.

We are dependant as a province on the talent and the ingenuity of the people in this province. If we can find means by which we can tap into that talent, if we can find additional means by which we can take that ingenuity and harness it in some fashion, if we can find means by which we can incent that in some fashion through those organizations and institutions that are put in place to do exactly those kinds of things, it's the type of thing we should be doing. It's the reason that I believe the Premier, in our second year in office, put in place the Reaching Higher plan. It spoke to the need to invest in post-secondary education, in our colleges and universities.

This, frankly, is an opportunity to advantage some of that investment. Bill 100 is a way of taking advantage of some of these investments we've already made by saying, "We're investing in our colleges and universities; we're building their capacities." Why not take advantage of that through a tax incentive structure so that they will be encouraged to develop the products, to commercialize products, to move into the marketplace. That will take that initial investment in the training of young people in a research capacity and turn it not into one job but into 10 jobs or 100 jobs or, might I say, tens of thousands jobs here and elsewhere? Those jobs may develop, ultimately, outside of Ontario. They may even develop outside of Canada. But when they do or if they do develop there, they will have to look to us for that expertise to maintain that structure and enhance that structure.

So as much as the Ideas for the Future Act will help us commercialize products here, I would think in the longer term we would be pleased to see if there was capacity for those technology ideas to be commercialized elsewhere in addition and then take advantage of the skills and talents we have here to support that. It would be a good thing for the province of Ontario and a good thing for all the people of Ontario.

We want to support innovation in our colleges and universities here in the province. It's why the Premier established the Ministry of Innovation and Research. That's why, during this mandate, he has appointed Minister Wilkinson to head up that ministry, and the minister is here this afternoon because he understands as well or better than many of us here in this place about the importance of innovative ideas within the province of Ontario.

I had the opportunity yesterday, along with Minister Wilkinson—not yesterday; I should correct myself. You lose track of the days around here, this being Monday—late last week to participate with the minister in an announcement around one of his initiatives with a company, Purdue Pharma, in Pickering, part of my riding. The province is, through a partnership, investing—I think the number is \$5.3 million—

Hon. John Wilkinson: It's \$4.9 million.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: —\$4.9 million into an investment there, making it \$32 million plus. It will do a couple of things. They're going to be hiring as they complete that program, that project, and roll out the development of new drugs, not only drugs that are going to be used here in Ontario or here in Canada, drugs that are going to have worldwide patents, ones where we will be the principal or sole provider of that drug on an international basis. The minister was there not only to make the announcement along with the Premier but because a company like Purdue Pharma Canada, which has companies internationally, was competing with the US, Singapore and Beijing for this investment. And because we saw the wisdom of having an innovative strategy in place to invest in this company, they've opted to make that investment here in Ontario. Not only will that create jobs in short-term construction and not only will it create jobs to continue manufacturing products they're already making, that investment will do very much like Bill 100 will do, only they're doing it now because their products are already in the marketplace. They'll be creating new drugs, new technologies for the treatment of illness.

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There are multiple opportunities for us to be able to take advantage of the talent, the ingenuity and the skills there are in the province of Ontario, particularly the new generation: those who are coming through the system now, those with the really the new ideas, those with the really great ideas, those who are willing to reach beyond the boundaries of conventional thinking to help make this province what it needs to be in the future.

Bill 100 may seem like a small step. It may seem to some that it's fairly marginal. We all know—we'll hear it

said here before long, I'm sure—that many companies don't reach corporate profits for a period of time from initiation. That's the reason there's a 10-year period of tax exemption for these corporations when they start up. It gives them not only the opportunity to get ramped up, but to take full advantage of the corporate tax exemption provided under Bill 100. It focuses attention on some very specific areas, because from all the research that has been done, we see those as opportunities for real growth in the future—the real next generation of opportunity in the province of Ontario.

It's a pleasure to be able to stand for a bit of time this afternoon to speak to Bill 100. I am anxious, as we move through this, to see and hear from others in the Legislature. I'm anxious to have the opportunity to hear the balance of the debate as it continues. The economy is moving quicker than any of us might have expected. It's no longer moving at 60 miles an hour on the 401; it's moving maybe something beyond what we might have seen with the space shuttle on its return, and the objective would be to have it move at the speed of light; in essence, to have new innovation in this province sooner rather than later.

We want to build on existing measures to tax cuts that have already been made in the province. This is one element; it's one focused area. It's not by any means the only thing we have done in respect to the tax cutting and tax elimination where it has been deemed appropriate. The elimination of capital taxes in the manufacturing, forest and resource sectors, in a retroactive fashion, was part of that. Changes in the tax structure for small business on the education side are part of that. There are many examples where we have worked in that regard. This is an incentive for new opportunity. We believe it's one of the fundamental parts of the five-point economic plan, and that's the innovative part of the strategy. This is going to play a significant part in this.

If passed, the Ideas for the Future Act, 2008, is going to help us sustain the high quality of life we enjoy today. To do that, we need to change the way we do business and the way we think. But particularly, we need to create high-value jobs that ensure that all Ontarians continue to have a prosperous future.

I look forward to the debate, and hope that when the debate is finished, all members of the Legislature can find themselves able to support Bill 100.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I appreciate the opportunity to make a few comments with respect to Bill 100, the Ideas for the Future Act, 2008. I would say at the outset that it is something that we in the Progressive Conservative Party could support. It is something that, as far as it goes, we certainly need to be doing in the province of Ontario. Certainly we would agree that we need to be bold, we need to be innovative. Particularly as many sectors in the manufacturing economy are under fairly significant stress right now, we need to be thinking outside the box and looking for solutions.

This certainly would appear to be one of them, but I would say there are several impediments to allowing this bill to be as effective as it otherwise might be. One is the fact that it's not an exemption but a refund. We all know how that goes. You pay the tax, write out a thousand pieces of paperwork and submit the application, and then you wait. I think there needs to be some kind of guarantee that you're going to receive this in a fairly quick timeline in order to be able to take full advantage of the exemption.

Secondly, it is only available to certain new businesses. It doesn't qualify existing businesses that commercialize new intellectual property, but only ones that are in existence. That further narrows the eligibility and the types of businesses that are able to apply. Then it's only available to eligible commercialization businesses, which means that it's only applicable to the types of businesses that fall into the government priority areas. Again we have something that's restricted even more.

While we would hope this would be a broad-based, innovative type of legislation, it is something we can support, as far as it goes, but we wish it could have gone further to stimulate other areas of the economy that also need help from the government at this very critical time in our troubled economy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise to commend my friend from Pickering-Scarborough East, because he attempted, in some 25 minutes, to wax eloquently on a bill that I am sure he realizes is going to do next to nothing to solve the financial crisis and the economic crisis facing this province and the people of Ontario. He waxed so eloquently in talking in hyperbolic terms of how this is going to help in research and innovation, and I listened intently for the entire period for him to try to put a figure to it, but of course he did not. Being the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, I was sure that he was going to talk about how many millions or billions of dollars the government was going to flow into this great and mighty program, but he did not. I guess, sadly, the reason he did not is because the costs of this proposal are absolutely infinitesimally low.

According to the Ministry of Finance, to which he is the parliamentary assistant, the proposal will cost \$5 million in its first year and then jump to the huge amount of \$7 million annually in each of the 10 years that this program is supposed to take place. To put that number in perspective, that is somewhere between 0.005% and 0.007% of the provincial budget when fully costed out. That doesn't sound like the initiative is really a priority of this government. In fact, it is not. It is a feel-good announcement. It is to pretend that something is being done, when in reality the government is putting very little toward this bill at all.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to thank the former mayor of Pickering for his insights into this bill. This bill, the new ideas job fund here, for the commercialization of new

ideas, is \$10 million, but it's got to be taken in context. This is also part of the government's \$1.1-billion Next Generations of Jobs Fund, which is really enhancing all kinds of new ideas, and then the advanced manufacturing initiative we have, another \$500 million. So that's quite substantive—over \$1.5 billion for new ideas, new jobs.

I hope this bill will help resolve my pet peeve, and that is the big 50-gallon water heaters we have in our basements boiling away this water, useless things that we all have to have. They're at home cooking right now as we're sitting here. I keep saying to myself, "Why can't we in Ontario get someone to use some of this money the government is putting forward to develop one of those little Portuguese on-the-wall water heaters?" They're on-demand. They cost about \$300 to \$500 in Portugal; you can get them in South America, you can get them in Italy, in England.

That's all I want, a company in Mississauga, a company in Pickering, in Oakville, somebody to build these little Portuguese water heaters that I can put in my house.

Mr. Michael Prue: They sell them at Home Depot.

Mr. Mike Colle: I asked at Home Depot how much these on-demand water heaters cost. They're \$2,000, and the thing is made in, I think, Czechoslovakia, and then another \$1,100 to install it. So I'm going to pay \$3,300 plus tax etc.?

I don't know if the member will listen to me, but maybe this idea fund will get me one of these little cheap on-demand water heaters. I don't want that water cooking away in my house right now. I want to shut that off, and when I go take a shower or wash the dishes, I want to turn it on. I don't want—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. I appreciate it. Questions and comments?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I don't know how he got into hot water heaters. I like my hot water heater. I like to take a shower; maybe the member opposite is not so inclined.

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But notwithstanding that, I represent a high-tech area of the province of Ontario, the former city of Kanata, and I want to tell you how useless this bill is. Basically, this bill would finance the hiring of 50 to 70 engineers over the period of the time of this legislation, for 10 years—50 to 70 engineers; such a small number of people who would be involved in innovation for our province.

The other thing that I would like to ask the parliamentary assistant for the finance minister is, why do we need this bill? I mean, you can create a program tomorrow. The best thing about the bill is the title. There's nothing else in the bill. You can create this program tomorrow without any legislation. This Legislature costs the taxpayers over \$100,000 a day for us to sit here. Why didn't you create the program, make it a little bit bigger so you could hire another engineer and forget this useless piece of legislation we have in front of the House?

Mr. Mike Colle: What a cynic.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: It doesn't make any sense. You don't need it. This is a feel-good bill. Let's deal with

the real issues of the day. Let's deal with the economy. Let's deal with the auto sector. Let's deal with real issues. This is a sham.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I'll return to member for Pickering-Scarborough East, who has two minutes.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: As always, I certainly appreciate the comments that are made from around the House. I don't necessarily always agree with them but I appreciate the fact that the members take the time, whether from Whitby-Oshawa, Beaches-East York, Eglinton-Lawrence or Carleton-Mississippi Mills. There will be lots of—

Interjection.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I said I don't necessarily agree with them.

One can always be somewhat picayune and say this amount of money is not going to do all of this. My reference to Purdue Pharma—our investment of \$4.9 million is creating an opportunity for an investment by them of over \$30 million initially, creating 50 high-tech jobs as they roll the program out, and at the same time an opportunity to create new products that will be worldwide.

I appreciate the member from Eglinton-Lawrence's comments. He wants to get down to the nitty-gritty—just give me something I can use; give me something practical out of this; give me something that is going to make sense. It brings us in part back to what our friends at RIM have done over the years. When we talked about that as being—some of us said, "What's all that about? Why would you think about doing something like that?" And now we take it for granted as, if not a necessary, certainly a desirable tool.

This bill is intended and will incent innovative activities through our research institutions, our universities and our colleges and over time, I'm confident, will produce exactly the kinds of outcomes that we're looking for at this point: new opportunities, new ideas, new jobs in the next generation of job opportunity in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Norm Miller: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: I understand that we have unanimous consent to defer our critic's lead on Bill 100.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is there unanimous consent of the House to defer the leadoff speech by the member for Niagara West-Glanbrook? Agreed.

Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: Bill 100, the corporate tax refund for new companies that commercialize research: My goodness, it sounds like such an august and wonderful thing that's being presented here. I have to tell you, I sat through the first reading, the second reading, committee, and now we're here listening to waxing-eloquent speeches of everything this is going to do. You know, it's going to spend the entire amount of \$5 million this year and \$7 million in perpetuity, and as I said in my comments, that's 0.005% of the budget of this province. That's how much is being invested in innovation and

research under the guise of this bill. We have very serious concerns about the effectiveness of Bill 100 in creating new innovation and new economic opportunities in Ontario.

When the bill was first put forward, I listened to the Minister of Finance. I even wrote down what he had to say because it sounded like it had so much promise. Minister Duncan said, "This bill is meant to attract individuals with great ideas from all across Canada to set up their businesses" in Ontario. "It would help launch the next wave of Ontario's innovators by helping companies keep more of their income to invest and grow. It would also reinforce the critical role that universities and other public research institutes play in our economy and the next generation of jobs."

If anyone listened only to that, they might have some hope; they might think that something was actually being done here; they might think that the universities are going to have all of this money that's going to flow in; and they might think that these companies, which are struggling, might see some tax dollars and a few things coming their way. But I don't think that that's what's happening at all.

Perhaps the minister didn't talk to those in the venture capital business who might actually benefit from a program like this being proposed—if, in fact, the program had any money. But we have talked to the venture capitalists, so I want to tell the House and the parliamentary assistant—

Mr. Mike Colle: That's an oxymoron—"venture capitalism."

Mr. Michael Prue: It's an oxymoron because the government no longer does anything for them.

I'd like to fill him in on the details of our discussion with several industry groups that represent companies that invest in the commercialization of research. They have told us in a nutshell that it takes eight to 10 years for a venture capital company to be profitable. So when the government offers money and says that it's a 10-year program, the reality is that most of the companies that are setting up today and would be eligible won't even be profitable until the time that the bill ceases to exist. Most of them won't be profitable at all. If you're not profitable, you don't pay any taxes. If you don't pay any taxes, you can't get any rebates from this bill. This bill is going to do absolutely nothing, which is why the government set \$5 million, 0.005% of the budget, or \$7 million, 0.007% of the budget, in order to finance it.

Companies in commercial research in the advanced health and biotechnology sectors need those eight to 10 years to become profitable. Giving a company a 10-year tax break when it takes eight to 10 years for them to earn taxable profits means that, overall, this program is almost valueless. That explains why the costs of the proposal are so low. How is \$5 million going to help this sector? Why would the minister introduce a 10-year tax refund of a bill that won't put commercializers of research ahead?

Ontarians see through this charade. Bill 100 is no opportunity for the McGuinty Liberals to pat themselves on the back, although I saw a lot of back-patting going on

over there, a little bit of cheering here and there, but there is nothing here at all.

Those who invest in new companies commercializing research aren't concerned with the income tax structure. The problem that they have is a lack of capital. The venture capital market took a hit when the technology bubble burst in 2000-01. Although the technology sector has recovered, the venture capital sector has not. The real problem in Ontario is that venture capital is not finding its way to these new industries.

Here are the reality and the ugly numbers: Between 2000 and 2006, first-time venture capital financing decreased by 92%. The problem isn't going to be resolved by \$5 million. Venture capital in Ontario has decreased by 92% in the first six years of this millennium. The number of companies benefiting from first-time financing went from 187 companies in the year 2000 down to 41 in the year 2006. So only about a quarter of the companies that were able to receive venture capital at the turn of century into the new millennium were receiving it in the last year for which we have statistics, in 2006.

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In Ontario, venture capital investment fell from \$750 million to \$685 million, back to the 1988 levels. That's much different than other provinces, which saw a 9% increase, or the US, which had a 13% increase in venture capital investment. So Ontario is lagging way behind, and what is the government's answer? The government's answer is this bill, which is going to do virtually nothing. While Ontario had 88% more venture capital than Quebec in the year 2002, that gap narrowed to 13% in 2006. So we are getting worse and worse in terms of venture capital, while people all around us in the United States and in other provinces are getting better and better. Some funds have simply stopped trying to raise capital because of the total lack of interest. There's no light at the end of this tunnel, absolutely none.

It is important to mention that venture capital is critical to the creation of long-term, high-paying jobs in this province. Venture capital is about getting cash to start-ups in new ventures, new innovative fields like biotechnology, green energy, computing and telecommunications, so that they grow into successful companies. We all know about RIM. We all know about companies that have been successful, and venture capital was important to them. Retail venture capital funds contribute \$2.3 billion to the Ontario GDP annually, and that is thousands of jobs. Contrast \$2.3 billion in something that actually works with \$5 million in this bill that's going to do virtually nothing.

But the McGuinty Liberal response to the venture capital crisis has been totally, completely and utterly inadequate. They created a \$165-million venture capital fund, a token amount that industry insiders say will do nothing to help.

Bill 100, with its \$5 million this fiscal year and \$7 million next year, will do that much less. This government has taken a huge step backwards, while offering the paltry \$5 million, by eliminating the 15% tax credit

for labour-sponsored investment funds by the end of 2010. I don't understand where this government is going. Here is a pool of hundreds of millions of dollars that wants to get into venture capital, that wants to help resource new industries, that wants to look at innovation, and this government is cutting it off in 2010. I don't understand this at all.

Labour-sponsored investment funds are pools of venture capital flowing largely to companies that commercialize research in the advanced health technology and biotechnology sectors. That's what they do. That's what they've done since their inception, and that's what they want to continue to do after 2010, but this government is bound and determined to get rid of it, and I don't understand that. Is this your solution, \$5 million versus hundreds of millions of dollars of potential money? I hope not.

The credit provides additional incentives for investors to put up some of their money in riskier assets. These funds have \$2.9 billion in assets in 645 Canadian companies, and these companies presently employ over 70,000 workers, but this government is bound and determined to get rid of the program by the year 2010. By cutting the tax credit, the government is signalling that it doesn't want to encourage investors to take the risks necessary to develop new technologies in companies that create jobs in the long run. "Don't take that risk. We are going to take that risk with our \$5 million; don't you take it with yours. Don't you take it with your \$2.9 billion; we'll take it about our \$5 million." I want the government to understand how poor this is. I want them to understand that what they're proposing is no substitute.

The government has replaced good policy with gimmicks. Here's a quote from a publication of the Ontario Retail Venture Capital Association: "Ontario's commercialization agenda will flounder without a steady supply of venture capital and its research dollars will never translate into real companies with products, sales and employees." We need to get venture capital back into Ontario. The first thing we need to do is restore the labour-sponsored investment tax credit and enhance the credit's benefit; make sure that the credit can only be used to finance start-ups and target certain critical sectors. Let's create stronger incentives for putting money into venture capital. That's the first thing.

Secondly, we need to create a substantial capital pool, more than the token amount of \$165 million that this government has put forward, to get cash quickly into the hands of small start-ups which can turn new discoveries into sustainable jobs.

Since 2000, we have seen the venture capital market dry up. The financial crisis is leading investors to keep their money under their mattresses, and they are in no mood for any riskier investments that characterize venture capital. It's almost certain that the decline in the venture capital market will continue.

We continue to see signs of bad times ahead for venture capital just across the street. You know, I remember all the hoo-ha and everybody so excited about MaRS

across the street. I remember the Minister of Research and Innovation so excited about MaRS across the street. The MaRS building was, with so much fanfare, the centre that would be the focal point of research commercialization in Ontario. We learn now, sadly, unfortunately, that the MaRS building at the corner of College and University has been halted, as it was decided that the \$300-million expansion just wasn't worth it during these tough times.

Hon. John Wilkinson: That's private money.

Mr. Michael Prue: Well, there it is. The minister tells me it's private money. I know it's private money. There isn't venture capital to put into that private company across the street.

We need to have the money flowing so that we can have exciting projects that you—only months ago the minister was up here telling us how wonderful it is, and now he is saying that it's private money. Well, yes, it is private money, and it has dried up.

Here's what Premier McGuinty said when unveiling the centre in September 2005. Pretty witty words, I might add, in 2005 when he quoted: "Instead of sending researchers into space, we've made space for researchers. Instead of visiting Mars, we have brought MaRS down to earth. Instead of spending billions on interplanetary travel, you can fly here on the Red Rocket for \$2.50. We really have found a better way."

Yes, a centre for research may be important, but ultimately, developing innovative technology is about money. When private sector sources of cash disappear, there is bound to be trouble. The money has disappeared; there is trouble. The government's solution of \$5 million simply doesn't cut it.

Tony Cruz, the CEO of Transition Therapeutics Inc., a company that develops new treatments for people with diabetes and Alzheimer's, located in the MaRS building, said this to the *Globe and Mail*, and I quote: "Everybody's getting killed. Everything is down to the lowest levels you could ever think of.... There is just a lack of cash."

Bill 100 isn't going help the company or others like it. The province's token venture capital pool is simply not enough to get cash to the companies that need it. Without cash, these companies go broke before getting job-creating products to market.

If the minister is so concerned about getting these job-creating products to market, then the minister should be advocating for adequate funds. If he's going to pay for it from the government itself, I suggest \$165 million is not enough into the venture capital. If this bill is to do anything, \$5 million won't even fund one real project, never mind all of them.

Quite frankly, we are perplexed that there is so much government support or government member support for a bill that is so weak. A strengthened and enriched labour-sponsored investment tax credit would help give cash to companies that need it. So would a larger and significant capital pool that small start-ups could access. The Liberals have decided to put commercialization photo-ops before real high-tech growth policies.

In committee, we all stood there and we had all of two deputants come forward on this bill. They were talking about the bill and what could be done.

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Actually, I thought the most innovative, the most logical, the best one, came from the graduate students' association of Ontario. I'm not sure if that's their exact title. They were advocating on behalf of researchers in universities and colleges, those graduate students who go into applied and pure research. What they suggested is that if the government put \$5 million into the hands of graduate researchers and split this up 1,000 ways, giving each graduate researcher some considerable amount of money—I think what they were suggesting was 333 researchers in total at \$15,000—this could actually have a far better benefit than what the government is proposing here. It's money that would actually be spent. It's money that would actually allow the graduate students to continue in their research rather than leaving the applied and pure research in the university to go elsewhere to find employment. They suggested that this was the way that the government should be looking.

I listened to them, and I thought that they had made a pretty good suggestion. I know it wasn't on all fours with the bill, and I know in the end the government members ensured that it did not go through, but it seemed to me that that was the real answer. If we've only got such a limited amount of money, would it not make more sense to put it into applied and pure research? Would it not make more sense, if that's what we were doing, to help the universities and the graduate students who are ahead of the game, who are doing real yeoman's work in their field, to use venture capital for the businesses themselves? Of course, that was voted down; of course, that didn't go anywhere, because the government wants to look at a feel-good policy.

The whole sorry tale is unfortunate, because the industry has put real proposals on the table and the McGuinty Liberals have virtually ignored them all. Press releases and quick announcements have been their priority.

Now is the most important time to make real investments in start-ups. Good governments work to ensure that sustainable jobs are secured to help weather economic storms. We should be filling MaRS with good high-tech companies today, not waiting for the economy to pick up tomorrow. If the government really was serious about new high-tech jobs, then they would be stepping in to assist what is happening at MaRS.

Bill 100 is not going to create the jobs, as claimed by the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Research and Innovation. New Democrats await a real venture capital fund. That is the only thing that is going to work. This bill is a very sad reflection of what is actually needed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I'm so glad that I'm here this afternoon. I can't think of the number of things that my good friend from Beaches-East York got wrong in his statement.

First of all, it's not a \$165-million Ontario venture capital fund; it's \$205 million. And then he talks about these insiders he knows who are saying that this is inadequate. I can tell you that \$205 million, which represents a \$90-million investment by our government, has been matched—some \$115 million—by the following partners, who he obviously does not think have a good sense about venture capital: the Royal Bank, Toronto-Dominion Bank, OMERS, fonds solidaires, Business Development Bank of Canada, and Manulife. I'll stand with those partners any day when it comes to making investments in venture capital. That is \$205 million.

I agree with the member that venture capital is struggling right now. Thank God that this government had the foresight to create this fund right now, because if it wasn't up and running, I think it would be very difficult to create it today, given what has happened in the economic markets.

That is added to, for example, the new BlackBerry Partners Fund—some \$150 million from the private sector.

The other thing I wanted to mention is phase two of MaRS. The government's investment of over \$77 million means that MaRS, this tremendous centre of innovation, is up and running in full. The private sector is considering doubling that size. They want to make an investment of \$300 million. That's all private sector money. So they have decided, because they have three sites—one in New York, one in San Francisco, one in Toronto—because of the market conditions, to put a six-month pause on a construction site which was four months ahead of schedule, as they redouble their efforts.

So we're very happy that Alexandria group is still committed to this city, and I would not be cynical and think that somehow the sky is falling in. It is important for us to continue to make these investments. That's why we spend some \$400 million a year on research and innovation, which the member obviously thinks is not that much money.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to comment on the points made by the member from Beaches–East York. I think he raised some very valid aspects of Bill 100, most particularly how narrowly this bill will cover and how few sectors of our economy will benefit from it.

There are, of course, no incentives for existing businesses to commercialize new intellectual properties. The mining, the forestry, the agricultural and the manufacturing sectors: none can apply—and, of course, most notably the auto sector. So as meagre as the tax exemption bills offered in Bill 100 are, the sectors of our economy that we should be discussing and we should be incenting in this chamber were not even touched with Bill 100.

I think it's a truly unfortunate situation that we have a bill entitled Ideas for the Future Act and yet it doesn't cover the very sectors in Ontario's economy like agriculture, mining, manufacturing, forestry and, of course, the auto sector, none of which will be able to have any

kind of benefit when Bill 100 is passed by the McGuinty Liberals. It's an unfortunate indication of the priorities that the Liberal government has chosen to bring forward for debate. Instead of discussing innovative ideas and bringing forward positive suggestions on some of those sectors that are in desperate need, we are narrow casting on Bill 100, and so few Ontario businesses will be able to tap into it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? Seeing none, I'll return to the member for Beaches–East York, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Michael Prue: I had anticipated a few more questions and comments from such an august group here, but I do thank the Minister of Research and Innovation and the member from Dufferin–Caledon for their comments.

To the Minister of Research and Innovation, he contends that my numbers are not right. I believe that they are right, but there's the difference: You say it's \$205 million and I think it's \$165 million. But notwithstanding that, I was very taken with the fact that he did not attempt to defend the bill itself. He attempted to attack my position that there wasn't enough venture capital money. Does the minister honestly believe, even if his figure is right, \$205 million, that that is sufficient venture capital money?

I would hazard a guess that it is not enough at all. I would hazard a guess that since we have gone from sort of the engine in Canada, from the place where most venture capital once came to this province, to a place where less and less is coming and there are continuing declines in venture capital each and every year—there was no comment about that. All it was was a quibble over whether my figure is right or his figure is right. Quite frankly, there is no defence of this bill. He did not try to defend the bill because there is no defence. The \$5 million that is going to be spent on this bill is not going to do what is necessary to get businesses operating. He knows full well that it takes eight to 10 years before a company that needs the money is going to be eligible for it under this bill. Almost no companies that are started up today and that would be eligible will ever receive a dime. He knows full well that this bill is nothing more than a sham. He did not try to defend this bill at all but simply to attack me on a figure which I contest with him. Whether it's \$205 million or \$165 million, I leave that to the bean counters. I just know that this bill is not going to do what it purports to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Third reading debate adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Orders of the day.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The House adjourned at 1720.

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First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 39^e législature

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Tuesday 2 December 2008

Mardi 2 décembre 2008

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Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
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Président
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 2 December 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 2 décembre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CORONERS AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES CORONERS

Mr. Bartolucci moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 115, An Act to amend the Coroners Act / Projet de loi 115, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les coroners.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: On October 23, I was pleased to introduce Bill 115, the Coroners Amendment Act, 2008. Today, I have the privilege of rising in support of this legislation which, if passed, will significantly strengthen Ontario's death investigation system. The proposed amendments to the Coroners Act are part of our ongoing efforts to ensure that our death investigation system has the appropriate checks and balances to prevent a future situation similar to the one that led to the recent public inquiry.

Since 2003, a great many changes have been made to ensure the quality of death investigations in Ontario, especially in criminally suspicious cases. The chief forensic pathologist has developed detailed guidelines for the conduct of autopsies in criminally suspicious cases. In each of these cases, the autopsy now undergoes a peer review process to make sure that everything that should be done has been done, and has been done correctly. Now, when a pediatric autopsy is required, it is performed in one of four centres: Hamilton, London, Ottawa or Toronto. This ensures that complex and specialized pediatric autopsies are conducted by the most experienced and knowledgeable pathologists.

In June of this year, after an extensive international search, we appointed a new chief coroner, Dr. Andrew McCallum. Dr. McCallum is uniquely qualified to lead Ontario's death investigation system through this period of change. In addition, just last month we announced the proposed site for a new forensic services and coroner's complex. The new complex will house the Centre of

Forensic Sciences, the Office of the Chief Coroner and the Provincial Forensic Pathology Unit under one roof. It will provide state-of-the-art technology and laboratory facilities to meet the province's forensic needs now and in the years to come. By moving this project forward, we are addressing Commissioner Goudge's recommendations of a new modern facility to house the Office of the Chief Coroner and related forensic sciences. We will be seeking public input on the proposed site over the coming weeks.

Earlier, I mentioned Commissioner Goudge's recommendations. Without a doubt, the most important step we have taken so far was to ask Justice Goudge to form a commission of public inquiry into pediatric forensic pathology in Ontario. His detailed report, released this past October, has provided us with the information we need to help prevent a similar tragedy in the future. His report imparts that information, and its recommendations have provided us with a road map for future improvements to the death investigation system.

The resulting legislation now before this House is guided by Commissioner Goudge's recommendations and has a very clear objective. If passed, this legislation would lay the foundation for a death investigation system that, one, has greater oversight; two, improves public accessibility; and three, is more transparent and more accountable.

Each of the proposed amendments to the Coroners Act meets the intent of the legislative framework recommended by Commissioner Goudge's report and builds on the progress our government has already made to strengthen Ontario's death investigation system.

I'd like to spend the next few minutes reviewing some of the key amendments we are proposing. Let me deal first with defining the purpose of death investigations. It is important that everyone understand why a death investigation is held and what we hope to learn from it. Everything else about the system flows from the answers to these fundamental questions.

The proposed new legislation would establish in law for the first time the purpose of a death investigation. The proposed legislation would set out in clear and simple terms that each investigation conducted in the public interest answers five basic questions about the death—Who died? How did they die? When did they die? Where did they die? By what means did they die?—and further, that the results of an investigation are to be used to determine whether recommendations are needed to prevent similar deaths, or whether the death requires the additional public scrutiny of an inquest.

I want to deal for the next few moments with the item of establishing effective oversight. It's clear from Commissioner Goudge's report that establishing effective oversight of the death investigation system is the key to winning back public confidence in the system. In keeping with our efforts to strengthen the system, the proposed legislation would create a death investigation oversight council. This new council would oversee the work of the chief coroner and the chief forensic pathologist and hold them accountable for the quality of death investigations in Ontario. Under the legislation, Ontario's Lieutenant Governor would appoint members to the oversight council. Members would include representatives from the judicial, medical and government communities. In this way, the council would contain the specialized knowledge, expertise and experience needed to effectively advise and oversee the chief coroner and the chief forensic pathologist.

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I think it's important to spend a few moments talking about the way we are going to be strengthening the complaints process, because we must never forget that if a death is being investigated, a family has lost a loved one. This is a time of profound sorrow, stress and anxiety for the families, and while our coroners are experienced professionals, there exists a risk of misunderstanding and miscommunication in such situations. A strong death investigation system is a transparent death investigation system that is not afraid to listen and respond when a family expresses concern over how the investigation into their loved one's death was handled.

Under the proposed legislation, a new complaints committee would be established that would report to the oversight council. The committee would track complaints made about the handling of a particular death investigation or about the conduct of a coroner or a pathologist during an investigation. In general terms, complaints concerning the medical roles of coroners and pathologists would be directed to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, while complaints related to their roles in a death investigation would be directed to the chief coroner and chief forensic pathologist respectively.

The new committee would ensure that the chief coroner and the chief forensic pathologist respond to complaints promptly and thoroughly. If a complainant is not satisfied with the response provided by the chief coroner or the chief forensic pathologist, the complaints committee has the authority to review the complaint. Any complaints made against the chief coroner and the chief forensic pathologist would be handled directly by that committee.

It is critical that we ensure a high quality of forensic pathology services. In his report, Commissioner Goudge identified the vital role that forensic pathology plays in Ontario's death investigation system. Several of his recommendations were directed at improving the oversight of forensic pathologists, defining their roles and ensuring quality within the system. The proposed legislation addresses those recommendations and would, for the first

time in Ontario, establish in law the roles and responsibilities of a forensic pathologist in the death investigation system, as well as establish the framework needed to hold pathologists fully accountable for their work.

The proposed legislation would establish the chief forensic pathologist as the head of forensic pathology in the province. This would allow him or her to ensure the quality and consistency of services being provided by pathologists in the death investigation system across the province.

To further safeguard consistency, accountability and oversight, a new forensic pathology service would bring together in one system all of the province's forensic pathology services. These services are currently decentralized and run by regional forensic pathology units and other hospital facilities where autopsies are performed. The new service will report to the chief forensic pathologist.

The chief forensic pathologist would also be responsible for maintaining a registry of pathologists authorized to perform autopsies in Ontario. To be included on the register, a pathologist would have to demonstrate appropriate qualifications and credentials and continue to meet the strict performance requirements set out by the chief forensic pathologist.

As well as answering questions about the circumstances of a particular death, the chief coroner has a responsibility to protect public safety. Under the current legislation, the coroner is permitted to release the results of death investigations only to family members of the deceased. The current law does not allow the coroner to release the results to the public.

The coroner has a need to share certain information when not doing so would put the public at significant risk. For example, if widely used medical equipment were faulty and caused the death, the public would need to be informed. The proposed legislation would provide the chief coroner with the clear authority to decide when it is appropriate to share information to improve public safety.

There have been recent cases where families who have lost loved ones have called upon me as minister to direct the chief coroner to call an inquest. As minister, I currently have that authority under section 22 of the Coroners Act. Each of these cases has been compelling. As a father and a grandfather, I have nothing but deep sympathy for the pain these families have suffered through the loss of their loved ones. As minister, I recognize that the decision to hold an inquest must be based on scientific evidence and in the public interest, not on political considerations, however well-intentioned.

The intent of the proposed legislation is to build a stronger death investigation system, based on the principles of professionalism and accountability. It is the chief coroner who has the experience and expertise to decide when a death investigation warrants an inquest. And the chief coroner should be free to make that decision without political interference. That's why the proposed legislation would repeal section 22 and thereby remove the power of the Minister of Community Safety

and Correctional Services to order an inquest. While these powers would be removed, strict checks and balances would be in place to ensure that the decision whether or not to hold an inquest is a solid, defensible one and is in fact the right one.

That's not to say that a decision regarding an inquest cannot be questioned or reviewed. Decisions pertaining to inquests routinely undergo three levels of review within the office of the chief coroner. This includes the local investigating coroner, the regional supervising coroner and the inquest committee. The chief coroner can review the case if the family of the deceased is unhappy with the decision. The chief coroner's decision regarding an inquest could still be the subject of a judicial review if there is a desire to appeal his or her ruling.

When we talk about a strong death investigation system, we mean a system that delivers a consistent, high-quality service to everyone in Ontario, regardless of where they live. In his report, Commissioner Goudge recognized that delivering a consistent high-quality service is challenging in some areas of the province. The current shortage of doctors in certain northern, First Nations and remote communities results in longer response times in the event of a death, and sometimes it is very difficult for a coroner to attend the scene in an acceptable timeline.

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As recommended by Commissioner Goudge, the new legislation would provide for the appointment of individuals other than medical doctors or police officers to perform a coroner's duties. For example, paramedics or nurse practitioners might be appointed to fulfill the role. These details would be set out in a regulation. Of course, all death investigations would continue to be supervised by a regional supervising coroner. If passed, this amendment will give coroners the flexibility to meet the local needs and provide improved services to northern, First Nations and remote communities.

Making the best use of available resources is of paramount importance in the delivery of public services, and death investigations are no exception. The current legislation requires an inquest must be held any time someone dies while in the custody of a correctional facility. Over the years, it has become apparent that inquests into in-custody deaths that result from natural causes rarely provide meaningful recommendations to improve public or inmate safety. Under the proposed legislation, an inquest would no longer be mandatory in the case of an adult who dies from natural causes while in the custody of a correctional facility. This amendment would allow coroners to focus their resources on those complex cases where an inquest could result in meaningful recommendations to make Ontario safer.

Let me be very clear: All deaths of adult inmates in correctional facilities are, and will continue to be, thoroughly investigated by a coroner who is able to make recommendations to prevent similar deaths. As well, the coroner would still be able to call an inquest in such cases if he or she believes a person may not have died of

natural causes. All deaths in police custody or of minors held in a secure custody facility will remain the subject of a mandatory inquest.

I want to spend a few moments on recommendation 77 of Commissioner Goudge's report, regarding tissue retention. Retaining tissue samples, including whole organs, is a crucial part of the death investigation process. Testing done on retained tissues can help determine the cause of death and can contribute to public safety. Although coroners and forensic pathologists may need to retain tissues following the burial or cremation of a body for reasons such as criminal proceedings, there is currently no explicit legislative authority to do so.

In 2004, the Office of the Chief Coroner established a policy requiring family members to be notified when organs were retained and to be consulted about the final disposition of these organs. Commissioner Goudge acknowledged the current policy of tissue retention and in his report recommended that we retain that policy. The legislative amendments ensure that recommendations can be made to further develop and formalize the current policy of tissue retention.

In summary, the proposed legislation builds on the progress our government has already made to strengthen Ontario's death investigation system by laying the foundation for future improvements. If passed by this House, the amendments contained in this bill will allow us to create the more effective, more transparent and, above all, more accountable death investigation system that Ontarians demand and deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some comments on the minister's speech on Bill 115, An Act to amend the Coroners Act. I might point out that I have just had the chance for a cursory read of the bill so far. I believe we're going to be discussing it in caucus later today, and we'll be hearing from our critic very shortly with his perspective on the bill. I believe we're generally supportive of the bill.

The minister did prompt me to think of some questions to ask him, which perhaps he can respond to in his two minutes. Specifically, section 22 of the act, which authorizes the minister to direct a coroner to hold an inquest, is repealed. I guess I would ask the minister, first of all, how many times has this power been used in the past number of years? As far as I understand, it's been very infrequent—maybe once or twice—but could he let me know exactly how many times this power has been used, and has the power of the minister to order an inquest been abused? If it hasn't been abused, then I wonder why this section is in the bill. Why would we want to remove this discretionary power? Is it so that the government can avoid the opposition raising questions and demanding an inquest? You could just say, "Well, I don't have the power to order an inquest." I would like a response from the minister specifically on that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm pleased that the government is responding to the Goudge inquiry. We all know the circumstances that led to that inquiry, and the situations that families were put through, to say the very least, were tragic. There are a number of elements in this bill that the NDP critic feels are positive, and he will speak to those when he does his lead—I understand he won't be doing his lead today; we're going to ask that that be stood down.

We are very concerned about renouncing the power of the minister to call inquests. I understand that it could be extremely inconvenient politically, and that question was pursued by my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka. But the simple reality is that in the end this is a parliamentary democracy. People have to be able to hold a government to account and a minister to account. I think that retention of that power for you, Minister, or for future ministers, is important, because coroners can make mistakes and may take a political read and say, “You know, my masters may not be happy with this; I'm going to let it lie.”

In the end, that coroner reports to the minister, to the government of the day, not to the people. To withdraw that power from the minister, to set up a barrier between the people and those who actually make the decisions about what are, in the end, very significant events that can change the course of justice in this province and change the course of people's lives, I think, is a mistake. I'd ask the minister to go back, look at the act and reconsider that section in particular, because in a parliamentary democracy, we have to have accountability.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Dave Levac: I want to first thank the minister for a very meaningful, thoughtful and well-structured presentation about what the report was about and what our government's bill is about. It sounds to me like some people are going to zero in on one particular in that piece of legislation. Just to kind of put that in context, I want them to understand that the authority that is being talked about has been used once in this Parliament—once only—and has been asked for numerous times.

I want everyone to focus on exactly what we're asking for. What we're asking for is to have us remove any kind of action on a political level from the scientific and the practical. Does this minister have expertise in child forensics? Absolutely not. Do I? No. There are probably one or two people in this room who actually have any expertise in this area. So I caution us about saying this is democracy being lost.

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Quite frankly, this is not about us. I want to remind us that this is not about us. This is about finding answers to questions about the death of an individual. None of us in this room, except for maybe two or three, have that expertise. To assume that that expertise is not going to be used because of fear of political masters, I would say, is questioning the expertise and professionalism of the in-

dividual. So please, let's be careful of what this debate is going to turn into.

I would ask us to focus in on the wonderful report that has been done by the commissioner. All the improvements being made in that particular document are going to be adapted to the best of our ability in this bill and in further bills to come. I keep reminding this House that absolutely no one has a monopoly on the right answer and on writing the perfect bill. What we're trying to do here is move the bar higher and further for those people who need those answers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'll be speaking on this bill in just a moment, and I want to reassure the parliamentary assistant that there's no question: We won't be zeroing in on that. We want to know some answers to it, and we'd like to have a good explanation of the power of the minister to call an inquest, but overall I think we're very pleased that Commissioner Goudge came forward with this at an appropriate time. We've got some questions to ask, obviously, and we've got a lot of things to put on the record. However, in the end this is about people's lives, about transparency and about coming up with answers to questions that many people have asked in the past.

I look forward to the debate. I look forward to hearing the families who come forward and the professionals who will come forward in our debate at committee. I'm not going to ask for the committee to travel all over Ontario. I think we can probably hold most of the meetings right here at Queen's Park and find out the kind of interest that is here as well. I look forward to speaking for a while in a few short minutes, and will have a lot to add to the debate today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Community Safety has two minutes to respond.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I do want to respond to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka with regard to section 22. Section 22 has only been used once, as the member from Brant mentioned. We believe—I think the general public believes—that the decision to call an inquest should be based on science and what is in the best interests of the public. I don't think there should be political intervention or political interference in the process. We believe that the legislation we are proposing, in fact, treats the calling of an inquest in as fair a manner as possible, based on science and public interest.

Member from Toronto–Danforth, there is still the oversight; there are still the levels. A person first asks a local coroner for an inquest. If that is denied, then he or she can appeal to the regional coroner. If denied, he or she can appeal to the chief coroner. If not satisfied, there is a judicial overview that is still in place that that person can access.

Finally, I want to thank the member for Brant, who will, as parliamentary assistant, have carriage of this bill through the House and at committee. I want to thank the member for Simcoe North as well for his comments and

for the comments he will deliver in a few short moments and during this debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm very pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 115, An Act to amend the Coroners Act. I want to point out immediately that this bill—I won't read all the parts of the explanatory note, but certainly there are a number of amendments to the Coroners Act: amendments respecting pathologists, amendments respecting post-mortem examinations, amendments respecting oversight and complaints, amendments respecting coroner's investigations, amendments respecting the determination to hold an inquest, amendments respecting inquests and amendments respecting administrative matters—so there are a few housekeeping amendments as well.

I think the minister mentioned just very briefly in part of his comments today, "A strong death investigation system is a transparent death investigation system...." I think you said that a little earlier, and I wanted to point out that I hope that, in the end, this is what we are trying to resolve here.

I want to congratulate Justice Goudge for the recommendations he made. I know this whole area of this particular ministry, the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, crosses over a lot into the Attorney General's office, because it was the Attorney General who appointed the commission. But in the end, we're dealing with some very, very sensitive issues here, and this is no time for any of us to play partisan politics. We want to make sure that what we're providing here with Bill 115 is something that is good for Ontario and for the future of the families in Ontario.

There are a number of things that I want to put on the record here today. There are concerns and questions that need to be debated in committee. However, we are pleased that the government has thoroughly addressed the concerns presented by Justice Goudge. Accurate, professional and accountable forensic pathology is a very important element within the administration of justice and vital to ensuring that justice is done.

I want to give background on it from our caucus's perspective. In November 2005, Dr. Barry McLellan, the chief coroner of Ontario, announced the scope and format of a review into 44 criminally suspicious and homicide cases dating back to 1991 where Dr. Charles Smith had performed an autopsy or provided an opinion in consultation. The purpose of the review was to determine whether the conclusions reached by Dr. Smith in his autopsy or consultation reports or during his testimony, where applicable, could be supported by the information and materials available for independent review.

On April 19, 2007, Ontario's chief coroner released the results of a review of the cases handled by pediatric pathologist Charles Smith and determined that there were problematic scientific findings in 20 of the cases, 12 of which involved convictions and one in which the accused was declared not criminally responsible.

An Inquiry into Pediatric Forensic Pathology in Ontario was established by the government of Ontario, pur-

suant to the Public Inquiries Act, on April 25, 2007, and it was originally due to be completed by April 25, 2008. However, that date was later extended to September 30, and it was of course headed by Justice Goudge.

The inquiry's mandate was to conduct a systematic review and assessment of the policies, procedures, practices, accountability and oversight mechanisms, quality control measures and institutional arrangements of pediatric forensic pathology in Ontario from 1981 to 2001, as they relate to its practice and use in investigations and criminal proceedings. Individual cases were not to be examined, although the 2007 review of cases examined by Charles Smith was referenced as evidence of serious problems within the current system. The Inquiry into Pediatric Forensic Pathology in Ontario report was released October 1, 2008. The Coroners Act was before the House for first reading shortly thereafter, on October 23, 2008—just a few short weeks ago.

I would also like to zero in on the coroner and the forensic pathology from our research on this. The Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario is part of the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services and acts pursuant to the Coroners Act. Currently, there's no mention of the role of forensic pathologists in the act.

There are approximately 7,000 forensic post-mortem examinations performed in Ontario each year; this includes approximately 400 cases which are initially investigated as criminally suspicious or homicide cases. There is a worldwide shortage of properly trained and accredited forensic pathologists, and in Canada there are no domestic postgraduate training programs in forensic pathology. This has meant that students have been forced to go to other countries for training.

Nevertheless, despite failing to recognize forensic pathology programs in Canada, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada has formally recognized the subspecialty of forensic pathology.

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"The purpose of forensic pathology is to assist the state in finding out why its citizens die. The medical dimension of forensic pathology involves the study of disease and injury in a deceased person, using the basic principles and methodologies of pathology to determine, if possible, the cause of death and to address the timing of injuries or other medical issues that help explain the death. Its legal dimension is to assist the state's legal systems, most importantly the criminal justice system, to understand how the death occurred by explaining the relevant pathology.

"Forensic pathology typically involves the performance of a post-mortem examination, also called an autopsy, which entails the dissection of the body, an examination of organs and tissues, and ancillary investigations including X-rays, laboratory examinations and toxicology testing.... In summary," forensic pathology "focuses on interpreting the post-mortem findings to assist in the end point of the death investigation required by the state, which may include a criminal trial, an inquest, or a coroner's finding of cause and manner of death made without an inquest."

I have the executive summary of the Goudge report with me today. According to the executive summary on page 4, "For the community at large, failure in such traumatic circumstances comes at a huge cost to the public's faith in the criminal justice system—a faith that is essential if the justice system is to play the role required of it by society. The cases we examined at the inquiry demonstrate how vital the role of the forensic pathologist can be in the success or failure of the criminal justice system in coping with the sudden, unexpected death of an infant in criminally suspicious circumstances."

The report identifies three areas that lead to the systemic failure from 1981 to 2001: weakness in the oversight and accountability mechanisms, inadequate quality control measures, and defective institutional arrangements for pediatric forensic pathology and more generally for forensic pathology.

There were 11 themes in which 169 recommendations were made. They are: (1) professionalizing and rebuilding pediatric forensic pathology; (2) reorganizing pediatric forensic pathology; (3) enhancing oversight and accountability; (4) improving the complaints process; (5) best practices; (6) effective communications with the criminal justice system; (7) the roles of coroners, police, crown and defence; (8) the role of the court; (9) pediatric forensic pathology and potential wrongful convictions; (10) First Nations and remote communities; (11) pediatric forensic pathology and families.

I want to now zero in on some quotes that we've seen here, and then go to a personal note from some folks who are in the audience here today. I wanted to put these quotes in because they came out of the press releases from the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, but this is one from Minister Bartolucci: "Commissioner Goudge gave us the road map to a stronger, more accountable death investigation system. This legislation takes us a long way down that road. If passed, it would ensure that we have the checks and balances in place to prevent a similar tragedy in the future."

Also, I want to add, "This legislation would provide us the framework we need to truly revitalize the system and help us build on the work we've already done to earn back the trust of the people of Ontario," said Ontario's Chief Coroner, Dr. Andrew McCallum.

I go back now to when the inquiry was originally announced in April 2007, and I read this from, at that time, the Attorney General, Michael Bryant. I want to read this quote from him because it ties into my comments in a letter I would like to read from folks.

"Justice Goudge will spend the next year reviewing and assessing the systemic policies, procedures, practices, accountability and oversight mechanisms, quality control measures and institutional arrangements related to the practice of pediatric forensic pathology and its future use in investigations and criminal proceedings. Under the Public Inquiries Act, this commission of inquiry will have the power to issue a summons for testimony and for documents. Justice Goudge will deliver a report with recommendations within a year from today,

the goal of which is to enhance public confidence in pediatric forensic pathology." Of course, we know that was delayed somewhat.

"We need to improve the system and prevent this from recurring. These pediatric pathology reports may be only one element of the justice system, but one significant mistake in one report is unacceptable

"There can be nothing more tragic than the death of a child. Many families have already been through so much more than many of us could imagine. So, too, are miscarriages of justice tragedies for our justice system and for the individuals affected."

That takes me to a letter I'd like to read into the record today from the Farlow family, and the Farlow family is with us today. Tim and Barbara Farlow are in the members' gallery, along with their children Rob, Jack and Jenn. I'd like to welcome them here today. They have been very, very strong advocates on a case involving their little sister and daughter. I think if this legislation can prevent what happened to the Farlows from happening to other people, then it will be a success. The letter reads:

"Dear Mr. Dunlop:

"We would like to share our family's experience with the Ontario coroner's office at this critical time when the Coroners Act is being amended.

"The motto for the coroner's office is, 'We speak for the dead to protect the living.' Thank you, Mr. Dunlop, for providing a voice for our baby daughter, Annie. The coroner's office has failed to do so.

"Three years ago, our 80-day-old daughter"—and that's 80 days—"died at an Ontario hospital under a very disturbing set of circumstances. We raised the issues with the hospital and received letters of apology from hospital executives and from its chief of critical care. However, we could not resolve the problems with effective recommendations.

"We became aware that the hospital was in violation of the Coroners Act and once we alerted the president of this, the coroner was notified immediately.

"This is when our dealings with the coroner's office began. We first met with Dr. Jim Cairns in June 2006 and we placed blind trust in his expertise and integrity and that of the coroner's office.

"Dr. Cairns told us that the pediatric death review committee would investigate Annie's death. He said, 'Don't worry, I carry a big stick. I foresee that I will chair a meeting between you and the hospital once the review is finished in two or three months.'

"We had two goals: (1) to understand why or how Annie died, and (2) to obtain recommendations from the coroner to ensure that another child would not suffer and die in the same way.

"Our daughter was born with a serious and complex condition. We expected to make 'best-interests' decisions for her, and with the advice of her doctors.

"Something went very wrong with Annie's medical care. She died in a tragic set of circumstances within 24 hours of arrival at the hospital. Annie developed respira-

tory distress and the doctors told us it was pneumonia. A few hours after arrival, our daughter had a respiratory crash.

"When this happens, everyone is supposed to come running from all directions. For over one hour we stood there alone with the therapist, who was bagging Annie to help her breathe, until finally, the doctor called the critical care unit.

"Annie died 16 hours later. They told us she needed a type of surgery that she would not survive. Of course, we trusted and respected the doctors.

"When Annie stopped breathing we did not want her to be put on life support because we were told there was no hope.

"Days after our daughter's death, we realized that many things didn't make sense. We obtained a copy of the medical records. Our instincts were confirmed when a nurse with 10 years experience in a critical care unit reviewed the records. She said, 'I'm sorry, what happened wasn't right.'

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"Here is what we learned:

"—A 'do not resuscitate' order had been placed in the records before we gave consent;

"—No diagnostic tests had been done. There were many things that could have been wrong with Annie and many were treatable.

"—The final medication report was missing.

"We were in shock. We were so sad that our daughter died in this way.

"After nine months the coroner's review was complete. There was no meeting chaired with the hospital as Dr. Cairns had told us. The report stated that the care provided in the final 24 hours was not appropriate but before that the committee thought that Annie's care was reasonable and appropriate. The diagnosis for pneumonia was not definitive. No specific cause of death could be determined, but the report stated that the death was natural. It also stated that it was not certain that our daughter needed the stressful surgery. The committee made only two recommendations. The first was that they should do a forensic audit of the narcotic cabinet from the day that Annie had died. The audit was done and the report stated that all the narcotics were accounted for and that no active steps were taken to bring about Annie's death. The second was that the hospital should make sure other hospitals knew about their patient-centred care policies.

"We were very upset. These recommendations would not change anything.

"We met with Dr. Cairns. He refused to answer our questions about what happened on Annie's last day. We asked, 'How much narcotics were signed out for Annie?' Dr. Cairns said he did not need to tell us that. He became angry with our many questions and refused to answer them. He told us, 'The committee determined that your daughter's final care was not appropriate. You can go to the college or the civil or criminal court. That is not my call.'

"That was not what we wanted. There was something wrong with the system, not just one doctor. We believe that there was a problem with the medical care provided to children like Annie. All we wanted was to understand what happened and ensure changes were made. The coroner's office is the only body that has the expertise to review medical deaths and make recommendations.

"Besides, children like Annie have no protection in the legal system and a senior crown prosecutor told us that no matter what, they would not investigate.

"We decided to appeal for a coroner's inquest.

"We met with leaders from most of the major disability groups and with Senator Sharon Carstairs, who had authored many studies on end-of-life care. The groups understood our concerns and supported us. They all wrote letters to the coroner in support of our appeal for an inquest. The letters represented tens of thousands of vulnerable lives.

"The executive director of Community Living Ontario wrote a letter to the chief coroner. It stated: 'Nothing (the parents) have learned and communicated to us convinces either them or us that an inquest is unnecessary in this tragic case. In fact, the persistent attempts to close the book on this matter convince us all the more that it ought to be fully opened to public scrutiny.'

"Meantime we obtained copies of the narcotic sign-out sheets through freedom-of-information legislation. Dr. Cairns had refused to tell us how much narcotics had been signed out for Annie.

"We learned that in the final hours, two lethal doses of narcotics were removed from the narcotic cabinet with no doctor's order. We were very concerned.

"We decided to have a medical expert review our daughter's records.

"The reviewer informed us that our daughter endured continual and progressive asphyxiation from the fifth day of her life. He wrote, 'I am in complete disagreement with the coroner's reference that the early management of treatments and care of Annie's respiratory insufficiency were reasonable or appropriate.'

"With respect to the missing narcotics and the missing medication records, the reviewer wrote that the coroner's committee took 'a dismissive and cavalier view of the violations.' He wrote, 'Unless there are adequate and sufficient explanations, aren't we left with uncomfortable but plausible and suspicious speculations?'

"Our medical reviewer also documented 14 material errors in the 19-page coroner's report.

"In June of this year, we received a letter telling us tersely that our appeal for a coroner's inquest was denied. There was no justification and no answers to our questions.

"We wrote a letter to the new chief coroner, Dr. McCallum, asking him how it was determined that the narcotics were accounted for.

"Dr. McCallum wrote that there was no provision in the Coroners Act for him to review the case subsequent to the denial of an appeal for an inquest.

"He added, 'The matter is therefore concluded from our perspective.'

"After three years, we find it difficult to believe that we do not know how or why our daughter died or why it cannot be determined.

"Annie's death raises three major concerns related to the system.

"(1) There is a need to review the prenatal genetics program and the effect of the treatment of infants with genetic conditions.

"(2) Transparency is required regarding the admission criteria to the intensive care unit and the manner in which narcotics are used.

"(3) There is a need to review why there is no protection in Ontario for vulnerable lives like Annie's.

"On September 24 of this year we wrote a letter to Minister Bartolucci. We questioned the conduct and accountability of the coroner's office. We wrote that we were looking for proof and assurance that our daughter's death was natural and inevitable. We are still waiting for a response.

"All that we asked of the medical system was to give Annie a chance if it seemed to be in her best interests. Otherwise, we wished for her to have a peaceful and dignified death. When a child suffers without need and dies in this manner, something is very wrong.

"Hubert Humphrey wrote: 'The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, needy and the handicapped.'

"Mr. Dunlop, we feel the coroner's office failed us. We are of the supportable position that the coroner is deliberately withholding the truth. With the scathing conclusions of the Goudge inquiry, all Ontarians are left with justifiably shaken confidence in the accuracy of the coroner's office reports.

"We feel the coroner's office has proven to be incapable of policing itself and ask that you propose adequate checks and balances are installed to ensure the coroner's office can meet its mandate."

That's signed by Barbara and Tim Farlow. They are members of Patients for Patient Safety Canada. I want to thank them for being here today and for their persistence in this case. It's people like the Farlows who bring about the reason for change and the reason why we're here today. What I would like to say as we move forward with this is that this shouldn't happen to any family. In the end, the results of the inquiry and the passing of Bill 115 have to make sure that that transparency is in place so all of these types of questions are answered.

With that, I wanted to say there are a number of questions that we have to ask in the House today. These are questions that I can put on the record that will probably come up at committee, or maybe from some of the presenters.

The first question is, why has the requirement to issue a coroner's warrant for an inquest been removed?

Number two: Considering subsection 28(4), why can't the pathologist wait for the warrant, and what if their reasonable assumption is incorrect? How will this section ensure an investigation scene is not inadvertently tampered with? Are there ethical concerns raised by examining a body without a warrant?

The third question is: Will the annual report to be submitted to the minister, pursuant to section 8(7)(8), be made publicly available?

Fourth question: Will the annual report by the complaints committee, and submitted to the oversight council pursuant to subsections 8.4(15) and (16), be made publicly available?

Although the crown will still receive the results of an inquest pursuant to subsection 52(1) of the act, and despite clause 4(1)(d) and section 18.1, could the administration of justice be hindered by not, in the first instance, making the crown aware of the decision of the coroner pursuant to new sections 18, 19 and 29 of the act?

So there will be questions to be asked in this House and at the committee level. We do want to make sure, since this hasn't been amended in a number of years—I believe it was 1970. The parliamentary assistant mentioned that the question about the power of the minister to call an inquest has only happened once ever; that's something that I think we'll deal a lot with in committee, but it won't be the emphasis of the committee to zero in on one topic. If it's only been used once, I guess the question would be, why would we take it away, if it's that small a matter?

I think I've been very fortunate in my life. I've never had any problems in my family; my kids have been healthy. I have three little granddaughters and they're all healthy. But I can tell you that when people go through the trauma of losing a loved one, it does have a major, major impact on their lives. I lost a little sister at the age of seven. She died in a bus accident at a very early age, and for the next 30 years, before my parents passed away, it had an impact on their lives from that point on. They were never really ever the same. There was something missing in their lives, and it was her.

1000

As we look at the cases before the people in Ontario, as we look at people like the Farlows here today, there's something missing in their lives. And when there are questions unanswered about it, that's even more reason for us as parliamentarians to make sure that we get legislation right. We have to make sure we get it in a very positive light to answer these questions.

This is an area of our Parliament that I feel very strongly about. As I mentioned earlier, the coroner's office is one of those areas that a lot of people don't want to talk about. I would suspect that if you looked across the province today and you did polling on, "What was the Goudge report?" there would be very few people interested or very few people who would even know what we're talking about. But the reality is that it could happen to anyone at any time, to people and their families, and they may require that transparency and that ability of the

coroner's office to perform at a level second to no other organization, because people do need answers and they do want transparency.

Mr. Speaker, that's really all I had to say today. As I said earlier, it's not the type of committee that I think should be travelling to Sudbury and Thunder Bay and all over the province. I think what we need to do is have a thorough discussion in this House and make sure that we get the appropriate people to come before the committee. I'm not sure what your plans are for committee on this right at this particular time, but I do think it's important that we move forward in a positive manner so that Bill 115 becomes very positive legislation and creates a very transparent system for Ontario.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to this today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm going to comment, in some ways, more about the earlier remarks made by the member from Brant. When he talks about essentially turning this whole process—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Sorry to have to interrupt the member for Toronto–Danforth, but your comments are supposed to relate back to the speech that was given by the member for Simcoe North.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you for the correction, Speaker.

With regard to the comments from the member for Simcoe North, I think we always have to remember that what is before us is a political process, that any suggestion that this simply is a process that can be reduced to scientific analysis is one that can't hold water. We've gone through a process, an inquiry, showing that in fact there are tremendous limitations to science, tremendous limitations to the people who practise science and that, ultimately, steps have to be taken to ensure that science, which only deals with a small part of assessing reality, is actually carried out properly. It can be carried out in ways that are scandalous. It can be carried out in ways that are exacting and precise.

The determination as to whether or not good science is being put in place has to be ultimately in the hands of the government. The bill that's brought before us has to reflect their accountability and their ultimate responsibility to ensure that the coroners' system is a sound one, that the assessment of coroners' abilities is good and that the decisions made by coroners reflect the will of the people of this province.

To say that one can reduce that simply to a scientific analysis of a limited number of facts doesn't hold water.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Dave Levac: The member from Simcoe North and I have had many discussions back and forth over public safety and security. I was on the other side as critic and his party on this side, and we've engaged in some conversations. Never once have I ever gotten the

impression that he, nor anyone in this House, has ever forgotten that this is about people.

Before I make my comments to him to respond, I think we should be continually and almost all the time expressing our sympathies to those who have had to go through the process and who have not been able to bring closure to a death in the family. That is incomprehensible to most people whose families who have not gone through it. My sympathies, along with those in this House, I believe, would be appropriate to send to those families.

That said, I remind the member that some of the things he was talking about are actually what the bill is trying to do, and I think he has acknowledged that, and that is to improve the oversight and accountability on the death investigation system so that those answers can be provided. The oversight council is going to be created in order for them to review that process, to ensure that the information that is available is provided to the families—a complaints committee that allows somebody to have a voice inside if they feel that they're not being listened to.

The Goudge report coming out has tried to cover off those pieces of information that unfortunately keep popping up throughout our history in making legislation, because sometimes, in a lot of times, it's usually a reaction to some things that have happened that have gone awry. We need those types of checks and balances put in, into this House, into this Legislature, that the other member is talking about. It's not to depoliticize; it's to ensure that we're doing the right thing in order for us to move forward. The judicial review is now inside, so that when the minister removes that process, they have the judicial review to respond to. I look forward to this in committee, and answering some of those questions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I do appreciate the member for Simcoe North reading into the record this letter with respect to Annie, and I find that story disturbing.

I also find it disturbing that there have been allegations in the media with respect to Dr. Charles Smith and a number of autopsies. Some of these stories go back to 2005. This is 2008. I find it disturbing that it has taken the government this long to address this issue. I also understand that the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada is now doing something with respect to medical education and standards with respect to forensic pathologists.

But some very serious allegations have been in the media for a number of years now with respect to Dr. Smith and the mishandling of evidence: leaving police evidence in a desk drawer; evidence that did not come forward until, as I understand it, there was a police search to bring the stuff forward; the losing of evidence—again, evidence that was later discovered through a search, probably by somebody else. My question is, again, why has this not been addressed earlier by this government?

I commend especially the minister but I commend the member from Simcoe North for putting a personal face on this story as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Mike Colle: First of all, I want to commend the Farlow family, all five of them who are here, for having the courage to be here at this time. It's incredibly impossible, almost, to do what you're doing, I know. You just think of what it is to lose a loved one, especially a baby, and then at the same time having to go through the agony of finding out what caused your little daughter's death. All of us here are really very impressed by your courage and wish you strength in the days ahead. I know the member from Simcoe North mentioned that, and I think he did it in a very astute and very personal way.

We sometimes forget, as we're trying to make laws here, that we're talking about some very tragic circumstances. I commend the member from Simcoe North for not politicizing it and not trying to say, "Well, when did your government"—I mean, this type of challenge has faced many governments for many decades.

At this point, the minister, with the guidance of Judge Goudge, is trying to ensure that we do much better as a government, as a people, as a province, because we are all part of the solution, and today we are trying to take steps to do that. We've got to put our best minds towards this solution, because we can't allow families like the Farlows to go through this kind of agony in the future. There has been too much of it in the past, and at least we are taking steps to do what is right. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Simcoe North has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I want to thank the member from Toronto—Danforth, the member from Brant—who is also our parliamentary assistant—the member from Haldimand—Norfolk and the member from Eglinton—Lawrence for their words.

I guess, in the end, I want to congratulate the Honourable Stephen Goudge, the commissioner of this inquiry. I think he brought forward some key recommendations.

As we move through this process—we're just at the very beginning of second reading—it will be key to watch the committee and to listen to other comments that come forward. I think this bill will bring people out to make comments, that it will have a great deal of interest—and probably a lot of key ideas and recommendations that might be somewhat different from some of the legislation that we have in front of us.

But, in the end, as parliamentarians, we have a job to do here. We have to make our system as perfect as it can be. I think every Parliament wants their jurisdiction to be as good as any in the world, and we want forensic pathology in the province of Ontario and the office of the coroner to be a model for the planet. I think it's possible to do that.

I look forward to the future comments, but I also look forward to the committee hearings, the clause-by-clause and getting it into law so that this office has real teeth to work with and so that in the future we don't have to have people like the Farlows coming forward and having to

spend a day of their lives under the kind of stress that they are under here today. Thank you. It is an honour.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Given the fact that it's close to 10:15, this House is in recess until 10:30 a.m.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. James J. Bradley: I would like to introduce a member of the 33rd Parliament of Ontario for the riding of Brock, a regional councillor and chair of the regional municipality of Niagara, Mr. Peter Partington; his wife, Betsy Partington; and Neal Roberts, his executive assistant.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Welcome back to Queen's Park.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'd like to introduce, in the west members' gallery and the public galleries, members of the York University student body who, since they didn't have anything else to do with their time, decided to come down to Queen's Park and observe question period. Welcome, students. As always, you have my support.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to introduce the family of our page Sarah Ratzlaff: her aunt Katherine Holmes; her uncle Dave Woodward, and her cousins Ben and Matthew. They're in the west gallery.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Today I'd like to introduce the family of Sahara Douglas, our page, here today from Mississauga South: her mother, Nina Douglas; and her brother Liam Douglas. They're in the public gallery.

Mr. Jim Brownell: I'd like to introduce Uma Madan, a former teacher colleague of mine and a former special education teacher at Longue Sault Public School.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I, along with the member from Guelph, want to introduce young Sammy Cross. He's a student from Aberfoyle Public School. His artwork was actually used in a brochure in a campaign to encourage law students to practise child protection law. He's 8. He's here in the east gallery with his father, Dr. Michael Cross; his mother, Dr. Tracy Hughes; his brother Ben Cross, and his aunt Patty, who works in the Office of the Chief Justice.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TOBACCO SMUGGLING

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier. It deals with the current estimate that your government will run a \$500-million deficit this fiscal year and the necessity for putting that added burden on the backs of future Ontario taxpayers.

We recently saw published reports that almost 50% of the cigarettes smoked in this province are illegal. Pre-

mier, can you tell us how much tax revenue you're losing because of the illegal cigarette trade and what steps you're taking to collect it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I will answer that briefly and refer it to the minister.

There's no question that contraband tobacco impacts on our revenues. It is difficult to get a specifically accurate measure of that. You can see in public accounts year over year what has occurred, but we are continuing on a variety of fronts to arrest that decline in those revenues and continue new enforcement measures that my colleague will have the opportunity to speak to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Any objective observer would have to question this government's commitment to come to grips with this particular challenge. We only have to look at Haldimand county, where illegal smoke shacks are operating with impunity—one, unbelievably, on government-owned land. Talk about rubbing it in your face.

Minister, you and your colleagues are the 100-pound weakling here. Where's Joe Weider when we need him? Premier, Minister, why would you rather burden future taxpayers with a \$500-million deficit than enforce the law?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I can assure you I'm not 100 pounds, but I will turn that over to my colleague the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: And I can assure you I'm not Joe Weider. But this is a very, very serious issue; it needs a serious response and it needs a serious, coordinated effort. That's why the former Public Safety Minister, Stockwell Day, announced with the RCMP an action plan to stop the trade of illegal cigarettes. We know that 90% of illegal cigarettes come from across the border, from the United States.

We know we have a part to play in this. That's why the OPP is a partner in law enforcement with regard to fighting contraband tobacco, and we've had some successes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The minister didn't have to assure us he's no Joe Weider. There's not one Joe Weider over there.

We're advised that next week's report from the Auditor General will say that the government is losing at least \$500 million a year in tax revenues as a result of the illegal cigarette trade. Some estimates peg it as high as \$1 billion a year. We're in difficult economic times. Families are suffering, food bank line ups are growing, and your government is looking the other way as illegal activities siphon off at least \$500 million a year. This is truly shameful.

Premier, Minister, when will you muster the intestinal fortitude to challenge these lawbreakers?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I think we have, and I think we're doing a very, very effective job. It's never enough until every illegal cigarette is off the market.

Let me just talk about a few of the coordinated successes we've had with the RCMP and the Canadian Border Services Agency. On October 22, we seized 332 kilograms of fine-cut tobacco; on October 28, 200,000 cigarettes; on October 29, 200,000 cigarettes; on October 29 again, 199,600 illegal cigarettes confiscated; on October 29, we seized another 200,000 cigarettes; on October 29 again, we seized 302 kilograms of illegal tobacco; and on October 30, another 500,000 cigarettes.

Yes, there is a problem—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

REGISTERED DISABILITY SAVINGS PLANS

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. This past Sunday you quietly issued a news release saying that you intend to adopt my private member's bill, which I introduced in June, to prevent clawback of ODSP and Ontario Works payments for people who set up a registered disability savings plan. I understand you will be introducing regulations to allow for this change. Will you table those regulations in this House so that organizations and groups can review them to provide their input?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: That's an excellent question. I was very pleased on Sunday to issue a press release on the RDSP. We have worked with the community; we have worked with our stakeholders. We have listened to them and we have moved in the direction that our customers want, that the parents of disabled children want, and also those who are disabled, to ensure that their future life will be a lot better than it used to be.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I think the minister forgot the question. It was, will you table the regulations in this House so that we can review them, and the organizations who have supported my private member's bill, like the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario, Community Living Ontario, the Canadian Mental Health Association, OASIS—the Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs—and hundreds of parents who have been asking for this change? These organizations work every day with individuals who have disabilities and they would like to provide you with the best input on what the regulations should look like. Again, Minister, will you table those regulations in the chamber?

1040

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, let me thank the member for Dufferin—Caledon for her support for the disabled community. Thank you very much. I would also like to thank the parents out there and all these groups that are lobbying on behalf of those with disabilities. I'm very pleased that they came forward. We've listened to them and we've improved the registered disability savings plan. And to answer her question, no, we're not going to table the regulations in the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I do not understand the minister's reluctance. You know under Bill 94, my private member's bill, it would have been a legislative change and not quietly done through regulation, which, quite frankly, next week you could change again. Minister, I ask, will you support Bill 94, which would legislatively impose the change and ensure that families that are trying to save for their families' futures will be protected?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I'm going to say to the member from the opposite party that she would be very pleased to see the results. She would be very pleased that we have answered the call of parents and families who want to save for the future of their disabled children. They were very supportive of what we are moving forward with. We want to ensure that these people living with disabilities—developmental disabilities or other disabilities—will be able to have a better life than what they used to have in the past. So the parents will be able to put money aside for their children or family members, and I'm pleased that the federal government moved forward with such a plan and the parents will be able to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

POVERTY

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Premier. With each passing day, layoffs mount, good jobs are lost and more Ontario families lose the financial means to support themselves. A new report from the Ontario Association of Food Banks shows that in just one year, food bank usage in Thunder Bay is up 29%; in St. Catharines it's up 24%.

When will the McGuinty government begin to respond to what's happening? People are forced to use food banks because they don't have a job anymore or because they don't have a good job anymore. When are we actually going to see a response from the McGuinty government that starts to take this on, rather than more talk?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I welcome the question. Unhappily and not surprisingly in times of economic challenge, it is not unusual for a greater call to be made upon our food banks and our other charitable organizations that are there to lend additional support to our families. As people lose their jobs and as those with jobs have fewer working hours they will, in some cases, look to their food banks. That is a difficult reality for all of us.

I'm pleased to say, though, that we have been doing much to provide greater support to our families on an ongoing basis. We've been doing that for some five years now and I'll be speaking to that in a bit more detail in the supplementaries.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier talks about greater support. If that's the case, why are food bank numbers up in Orillia, Lindsay, Cornwall, St. Thomas, Stratford, Oshawa and London, in addition to Thunder Bay and St. Catharines? Why do we have another report from the Children's Aid Society of Toronto, which has

found that in the last 15 years, in the greater Toronto area, the number of children living in poverty has doubled?

The Premier says the McGuinty government is doing more and has made a difference over the last five years. Why do all the studies say that in fact people are facing more and more difficult situations, more children falling into poverty, more people forced to food banks?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Clearly, the global economic crisis has had an impact on Canada; it's had an impact on Ontario. It has affected our economy in a negative way and it's hurting our families. I think people understand that.

We have been moving on this for some time. Among other things, Minister Matthews will be shortly announcing our poverty reduction plan, but along the way we put in place a number of other measures to help our families, including our Ontario child benefit, which provides a monthly annual payment to families, including our working poor, which never existed before; we have increased the minimum wage five times now; we have increased social assistance several times over; we've introduced a brand new dental program for families in poverty; and we have doubled the funding for our student nutrition program to help out kids who are coming to school and who are hungry. Those are some of the measures that we've already put in place.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier pats himself on the back for a minimum wage which is below the poverty line. The Premier pats himself on the back for a dental plan which the government announced over 15 months ago and has not put one penny into. The Premier pats himself on the back for an Ontario benefit plan which so far has only had the effect of taking the back-to-school clothing allowance away from the poorest kids in the province and taking the winter clothing allowance away from the poorest kids in the province. That's what is happening. The McGuinty government continues to talk, talk, talk. In the meantime, conditions grow worse.

Again, where is the action for affordable housing? Where is the action for more child care? Where is the action to ensure that more people don't lose their jobs? We hear the McGuinty government talk every day. Where is the action plan that's actually going to make a difference in people's lives?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not surprised that my honourable colleague is not prepared to recognize the work that has been done so far by our government, but I am asking him for his support as we move forward on Thursday of this week with the announcement of our poverty reduction plan. It is something that I can tell you has not been an easy thing to do. It's one thing to move forward on the poverty front in good times, and it is quite another to make that heroic effort in difficult economic times. We're going to do that. I'll be asking for the support of my honourable colleague and his party as we find ways, find the necessary funding, invest new resour-

ces, put in place targets and a strategy to help us achieve those targets. We are going to reach far. We'll do the best that we can given our circumstances. But we are determined, beginning on Thursday of this week, to move forward with Ontario's first real poverty reduction plan.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Howard Hampton: Again to the Premier: We've heard the Premier talk for years now about poverty reduction. We still don't see the action plan.

But it's not just the people who are suffering. Hospitals across Ontario are being forced to make deep cuts in health services and deep cuts in nursing because of chronic underfunding. The Ontario Health Coalition, in its report today, says that we have a growing province-wide problem of underfunding of our hospitals. Communities like Ajax, Hamilton, Toronto, Waterloo and London have already witnessed hospital services being cut over and over again.

Can the Premier tell us why, when the McGuinty government says that it is doing such a good job in health care, so many hospital services are being cut from one community to another across the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I welcome this question as well, and I think it's important for all of us to recognize the facts. We have increased funding for health care overall by some 37% in the last five years; hospitals have received funding increases of just over 30%. So the fact of the matter is that we continue to provide more funding on an annual basis to our partners who are working on behalf of Ontario families in all of our hospitals. We have made it clear that we will continue to find ways to provide them with growing resources on an ongoing basis. That's the fact: more funding every single year.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The real fact is that more and more of the money which was supposed to be going to hospital health services under the McGuinty government is actually being siphoned off by profit-driven Bay Street corporations, which are involved in Ontario's hospitals like never before. In North Bay, a new hospital built as a public, not-for-profit entity would cost \$400 million; in the hands of Bay Street profit-driven corporations, the cost will now be \$1 billion. The McGuinty government says they're putting more money in. More money is going to profit-driven corporations; less money is going to the health services that people need.

Isn't that the reason that we're seeing cuts—more money for Bay Street; less money for the health services that people actually need?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: That's just not true.

We're involved in over 100 hospital construction projects in Ontario. My friend is suggesting that we use an old method of financing construction. If we did that, we couldn't proceed as quickly as we are.

We think it's absolutely essential for Ontario families that we revitalize the hospitals in their communities.

Where new hospitals are needed, we are building those. Where old hospitals need to be refurbished, we're doing that as well. Where they need to be expanded, we're doing that as well. We've found a way to pay that cost over an extended period of time. We understand that there is a long-term repayment schedule associated with that, but those families need that health care right now, and that's why we've built those hospitals.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, here is the reality: If a hospital in Sarnia had been built according to a public, not-for-profit model, it would have cost about \$120 million; put in the hands of a Bay Street profit-driven consortium, it now costs over \$300 million. North Bay: \$400 million to \$1 billion. Brampton: a hospital which has cost many hundreds of millions of dollars more in profit-driven Bay Street hands. That's the reality on one side. On the other side, physiotherapy has disappeared from a hospital like Kincardine. The acute care foot clinic disappeared from Peterborough. Publicly funded hospital labs are being cut and eliminated and hundreds of beds are disappearing.

Premier, when will you admit, yes, the McGuinty government is putting hospital money in the hands of Bay Street corporations? Meanwhile, the health services that people need from their—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I say to my honourable colleague that I can't agree with him. Those facts just aren't the case; they aren't representative of the reality.

I think Ontarians are entitled to ask themselves where we find ourselves five years later, after we've had a Liberal government with the privilege of serving all Ontarians. Well, we've got 100 hospital construction projects under way or completed. We have wait times down, whether you're talking about cataracts, knee replacements or cancer surgery. We have 630,000 Ontarians who didn't have access to a doctor who now have one. We have some 9,000 more nurses working in the province of Ontario. We've expanded drug coverage. We're expanding home care, expanding long-term care, expanding community mental health, expanding public health protection. Those are all the kinds of things that are real and meaningful to Ontario families.

We have invested a considerable amount more into our health care system—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier.

UNIVERSITY LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is to the Premier.

The CUPE 3903 strike at York University will be four weeks old tomorrow. That may not be long enough for you, Premier, but it has been far too long for York students who have had their academic year jeopardized,

who face lost employment opportunities and ruined plans for postgraduate studies. We, on this side of the House, cannot understand how you can justify your inaction on this issue.

Later, I plan to introduce a private member's bill that will call on the Minister of Labour to table back-to-work legislation before this Legislature can rise for the winter break. That private member's bill includes a provision for a legislated settlement and a three-year contract for the striking employees.

Premier, will you support my bill and have your minister table back-to-work legislation? Will you support the students who are here today asking for my help, for your help, to salvage what's left of their academic year? Or will you continue to stand on the sidelines and let the union trample the academic goals these young people work so hard to achieve?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: I think all members on all sides of the House are very concerned with the situation at York University and appreciate the frustration of the students, of the teachers and of everyone involved. That's why we continue to call on both sides to put the interests of the students at York first, to return to the bargaining table and seek an agreement.

As members are aware, there's a Ministry of Labour mediator who is working to try to get both sides to come to an agreement, and we continue to call on them, as I say, to take the interests of the students in hand and to come to a quick agreement so they can get back to the classroom.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: It's good to know for once where the McGuinty Liberals stand—too bad it's not with the students.

Incidentally, I have a box of letters from these students and I will ask a page to deliver them to the Premier before he leaves. I am just an MPP, just one voice, although I represent thousands of constituents. It's easy to say no to me, but as you answer this question, Minister, do not look at me, look at the students who are here today in this chamber and tell them why you are willing to prolong this injustice and why you're willing to let it happen again in 2010. Instead of getting an education in their lecture halls, they are here learning why they cannot count on their government to stand up for them and for what is right. You look at them, Minister, and you tell them why they can't count on your government.

Hon. John Milloy: We welcome the students from York University here today. As I said, we appreciate the frustration that they feel. But the honourable member does not have a monopoly on concern for what's happening at York University. That's why we continue to call on both sides to put the interests of the students who are here with us today, the interests of the students at York University, front and centre and come back to the negotiating table and reach an agreement.

As I said, the Ministry of Labour has appointed a mediator who is working with both sides, and we con-

tinue to encourage them to come to an agreement quickly so these students can return to their classroom.

UNIVERSITY LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. The McGuinty government has dramatically raised tuition rates; the government has increased class sizes and allowed Ontario to languish at number 10 in per capita funding; the government's indifference has created hardship for students and has led to the strike at York University.

Does this minister think it is fair that the workers who do more than 50% of the teaching at York get only 7.5% of its \$848-million budget?

Hon. John Milloy: I'm a bit disappointed that the honourable member is playing politics with this very serious situation. The fact of the matter is, as I said, we're all frustrated with the situation at York University, but let me correct the record for the honourable member. In 2008-09, the government is projected to allocate \$2.997 billion in operating grants to the university sector. That's an increase of \$1.1 billion, or 57%, over the base operating funding provided to universities in 2002-03. University per-student funding is projected to increase from \$6,718 in the year we took office to \$8,109 per full-time equivalent. We have dramatically increased support to our universities, and once again we call on both sides at York University—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to remind the minister that your Reaching Higher plan has been reaching deeper and deeper into the pockets of students, has created more and more contract teaching jobs, as opposed to full-time jobs, and has left this province last in per capita funding across Canada.

This minister may not like to hear it, but this government's lack of leadership is creating turmoil at York and at every other post-secondary institution across Ontario.

When will this government provide the funding required to end the turmoil and fairly compensate those who do most of the teaching at our universities?

1100

Hon. John Milloy: I was very proud to be part of a government that introduced the Reaching Higher plan: \$6.2 billion, the largest investment in post-secondary education in 40 years.

As I mentioned, this year operating funding for colleges and universities will have increased by 57%. We have 100,000 additional students in our colleges and universities and we've significantly increased per-student funding as well as dramatically increased aid to students.

I think the honourable member should look long and hard in the mirror before asking these questions, and talk about his record. When the NDP were in power, they cut student aid by nearly 50%. They cut funding to post-secondary education. They promised to eliminate tuition,

and instead increased it by 50%, and then had the gall to cut upfront grants.

DISABILITY BENEFITS

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question today is for the hard-working and dedicated Minister of Community and Social Services. Like many in this House—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Your time is running.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I've heard from concerned parents, Community Living Peterborough, concerned about the future of their children. Many have been looking hopefully towards the new federal registered disability savings plans to help make a better life for their kids and plan for their future when mom and dad may not be around.

Minister, will you tell us what our government is doing to help the parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, friends and family of those with disabilities? What is the government doing about RDSPs?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, let me say thank you to the member from Peterborough. He's a very hard worker on behalf of his community.

We all know someone with a disability, and many know the anguish of those—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Hamilton East—it goes both ways. I want to be able to hear the question, and I want to be able to hear the answer, and I would encourage you to do the same. I just ask the member from Hamilton East to come to order.

Minister?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: We all know someone with a disability, and many know the anguish of those concerned for their future. I was very pleased yesterday to issue a press release on behalf of the McGuinty government to announce that it is fully exempting RDSP asset contributions and withdrawals from eligibility for social assistance. This announcement means that an individual can continue to benefit from basic income support, employment support and health benefits, while also being able to take advantage of additional income through their RDSP. This also means that a person with a disability can use their—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thank you, Minister. This is wonderful news for Ontario families and great news for those in the disabled community. I know Community Living Peterborough, the board members and their families will thank this minister for her great work.

In addition to the McGuinty government's announcement on RDSPs, can you tell this House what other measures have been taken by your ministry to improve the lives of the disabled community each and every day in this province?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I would like to encourage all those who are eligible for a federal RDSP to apply.

To answer the question of my colleague, yes, the McGuinty government has done a lot to improve the lives of people with disabilities by introducing the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, and we are moving ahead with that commitment. On January 1 of this year, we reached a milestone with the coming into force of Ontario's first accessibility standard, the accessibility standards for customer service regulation. Four additional standards are being developed for transportation, information and communication, built environments and employment. Currently, the information and communication standard is out for public review and I invite everyone to give us their—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Transportation, and it relates to his proposed Bill 126, legislation which will affect young drivers in this province. I want to first of all compliment the minister and the government for bringing forward that section of the bill that provides for a zero blood alcohol level in young people. However, I want to bring to the attention of the minister—we've had this discussion—that we stand with young people and parents across this province who strongly oppose that section of the bill that restricts young drivers from having more than one passenger 19 years of age or younger in the car. We believe that is impractical and will in fact create a great deal of hardship for families across the province. Will the minister agree to withdraw that section of the bill before it gets to second reading, so that we can in fact focus on the more—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I want to thank the member first of all for a very constructive question. He is constructive in his approach to these matters, and helpful.

I do consult with my critics in the opposition, or the official spokespersons for the party, and with other members of the Legislature, and I want to say to the member that we evaluate all of the input that's coming in from those who are in favour of certain measures within the bill and those who are opposed. We think it's very important that we have that kind of public input, that kind of dialogue. I think the member has been a strong advocate of this because he knows that it makes legislation even better. So I look forward with anticipation to the continuing information that is provided in this regard, and I know that there are going to be very extensive public hearings that will be taking place on this bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: I don't know of any legislation that had more public response even prior to second reading than this bill. There is no question—we are hearing from young people, we're hearing from parents from across the province—that this cannot happen. We cannot allow

this legislation to be passed with that restriction in place, and the minister knows that. Mr. Robert Kennedy from Aurora is one of many parents who has written to me asking me to bring this to the attention of the minister. I'm simply saying we know how this place works. There can be a great deal of attention focused on this section of the bill that is negative. Why not withdraw it now, and allow the Legislature to focus on the substantive aspects of Bill 126, many of which we will support? But let's remove this section now. Will the minister undertake to do that before we move forward into even second reading of this legislation?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I am interested in the information that you've provided and the letter that you have read. I think I get letters on both sides of the issue. For instance, Rob and Jan Perry of Thornbury, who lost a son—and the resolutions coming in from council supporting what they wanted—who called home; there was no one home for a ride. He got into a vehicle with four other boys and they were killed, caused by excessive speed, apparently. It was a very tragic day for them. I know they have written to me.

I know that Carolyn Swinson for MADD Canada and Don Forgeron, vice-president of the Insurance Bureau of Canada; Peter Christianson, president, Young Drivers of Canada; Andrew Murie, CEO, Mothers Against Drunk Driving—I'm interested in all of them. The point I'm making is I'm interested in all of the input that we have coming in. I think it's extremely helpful. I have invited people, in fact, to provide that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Yesterday, the child advocate reported that he made his initial request for the investigation report that he was asked to get by a young person who made a complaint, not on November 5, as the minister said in this House, but rather four months before that, on July 24. Why has it taken more than four months and legal action for this minister to give the child advocate the information he's requested?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me begin by expressing again the enormous respect I have both for the advocate personally and for the position he holds. I can report that this morning, the advocate received the information in question.

But let's take a minute to review the facts. In July, the former advocate requested information regarding the case. Within days, she was provided with an investigation summary, as was standard practice and in line with privacy requirements. In the interim period, the new advocate took office and we began working with him on an information-sharing protocol to ensure he got the information he needed as quickly as possible and in line with the legally mandated privacy requirements. The formal request for the full investigation report—not the sum-

mary; the full report—was made on November 5. As the protocol has not yet been signed by the advocate, the ministry proceeded with the request under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and it required—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

1110

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This minister is blaming the advocate, when it's the advocate who has been trying to do the work on behalf of children in this province. In dealing with this ministry, the children and youth advocate said that he's "struggling ... to build working relationships within the ministry itself" and, "... it's hard to tell what's smoke and mirrors and what isn't." That's what the advocate says about his relationship with you and your ministry. The advocate can't even get an item as simple and straightforward as a list of licensed Ontario group homes in this province.

Why is this minister making excuses like "internal protocols" to stonewall the advocate and keep him from doing the job that this Legislature has hired him to do?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I had a good conversation with the advocate yesterday. I renewed my commitment to work as closely with him as possible because I have such respect for him and his office. I also said to the advocate how important it is to get that information protocol signed as soon as possible so we can get the information he needs in line with privacy requirements. As soon as we did get the signed consent of the youth in question, we released the report to him.

We have a good relationship. It's important that we give a voice to the most vulnerable kids in this province, but we also must abide by the privacy of third party requirements. We can and we will do both, but we need the advocate to agree to the protocol so we can proceed as expeditiously as possible.

DERTOUR TRAVEL ACADEMY

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: My question this morning is for the Minister of Tourism. The tourism industry in Ontario, like many sectors, has been facing challenges beyond its control. I'm aware that the international tourism market is an opportunity for growth in the province and it has been noted by the Ministry of Tourism that international arrivals are expected to double by 2020.

I've recently been informed that Ontario has been chosen as the host of the 2008 DERTOUR Travel Academy. Would the minister tell this House more about this group and the opportunities that this provides for the tourism industry in Ontario?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: The member for Kitchener-Conestoga is correct. We are presently hosting the DERTOUR Reiseakademie here in Toronto and in Ontario from November 27 to December 10.

This involves 700 travel agents from across Germany and Austria and 120 travel suppliers who are visiting Ontario and experiencing all that Ontario has to offer. It's an

annual training event for the DERTOUR travel company and it provides both experiential and academic training for their travel agents from across Germany and Austria.

Together with the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp., we are hosting it at the Delta Chelsea. We have partners in this: Tourism Toronto, Ottawa Tourism, Niagara Falls Tourism, Jonview Canada and the Canadian Tourism Commission, as well as Air Canada.

I was delighted to attend their opening night last Thursday. It was a great event out at the Science Centre. We got to actually showcase all—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: DERTOUR seems like a great opportunity to showcase the great tourist attractions that this province has to offer. In my own riding of Kitchener-Conestoga, we have several wonderful tourist attractions and offerings that would be of interest to visitors from Germany. For example, the world-famous Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest, the Elmira Maple Syrup Festival and academic training through the University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier and Conestoga College. As such, I would like to hear more about the DERTOUR Travel Academy. So could the minister please tell us what sort of experiences will be showcased for them while they are touring the province, and how can this result in more visits to Ontario?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: It really is an exciting opportunity for Ontario. DERTOUR owns 850 travel agencies in Germany and Austria, and has vendor agreements with another 9,000 travel agencies. They represent about 25% of the total German visitors to Canada, so we're excited at the prospect.

While here, our 700 visitors are visiting the CN tower, Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake, the Distillery District and Huronia, where I understand they visited yesterday in the snow and it was candlelit and simply spectacular; and on Thursday, they'll be visiting St. Jacobs, right in your neck of the woods. So we're very excited about all that they're going to get to see.

I think it's important for the members of this House to recognize that in 1992, when Toronto hosted the DERTOUR Reiseakademie, travel to Ontario by German visitors the following year increased by 33%. This is an incredible opportunity for our province, for our regions, and we're very excited to welcome all of these German travel agents to our region.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Premier. Last Friday, Ottawa council voted resoundingly in favour of a new transportation master plan. This critical infrastructure project will include a \$1.7-billion investment into Ottawa in its first phase. This includes construction-ready bus rapid transit for Fallowfield, Baseline, Moody, and getting the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge on line, all to the tune of \$278 million.

The city is in, and the federal transportation minister indicated yesterday that they will put their portion in.

Will this Liberal government commit today to invest in the \$278 million in construction-ready projects which are consistent with your five-point economic plan and imperative to our city's overwhelmingly endorsed transportation plan?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let me say that I congratulate the city council for adopting a plan. We've had \$200 million on the table for close to two years now. I think the folks in Ottawa, my hometown, know that we are very much committed to investing in public transit, ensuring that there is an alternative to the car that is affordable and that is user-friendly.

We are now going to take the time to give some very careful consideration to this plan. I have said for some time now that our original investment of \$200 million would very likely be less than adequate, given the nature of the work that has yet to be done in the city of Ottawa. I think the appropriate thing for us to do at this point in time is to take a long, hard look at the plan and make sure that we are on the right track together. We'll obviously keep that \$200 million on the table, and then together we'll see where and how much further we can go beyond that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Premier, Metrolinx is the \$17.8-billion public transit plan for central Ontario. The cost of that plan is borne by the province and the federal government alone. Property taxpayers in the GTA will not be required to share in that cost.

The public transit plan for eastern Ontario is embodied in the \$4.7-billion Ottawa transit plan. Premier, will you offer the same degree of support for this plan for eastern Ontario and your hometown of Ottawa as you have for Toronto and central Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question from my colleague, but I think that if he takes a close look at the numbers, he'll see that there are some additional costs which he has not incorporated into his question, which are properly the responsibility of some Toronto area municipalities.

Having said that, we have made it no secret whatsoever that we are absolutely committed to moving ahead with public transit in the city of Ottawa. We think it's important not just for our economy and not just for the environment but for the quality of life of the people who are living there.

I have also said that I don't believe the \$200 million will be adequate in the long term as we work together to develop a long-term vision and nail down a solid plan as we move forward.

So, again, we're delighted there's a plan in place, delighted to finally receive that. We will now carefully consider that and look forward to moving forward together even beyond that.

ONTARIO SECURITIES COMMISSION

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Mr. Minister, in the wake of the stock market

meltdown, hard-working Ontarians who have seen their life savings and pensions shrink are looking for ways to strengthen our financial system.

In 2004 an OSC report, the Osborne report on the fairness committee, concluded that the OSC's dual role in prosecuting and adjudicating securities cases created the appearance of a conflict of interest and a perceived bias and that they should be separated. The all-party committee on the five-year review of the Securities Act made the very same recommendation.

Four years later, why hasn't this government moved to separate the OSC's conflicted adjudicative and prosecutorial roles?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member raises a very good question. With respect to the complexity of all this, we have recently wrapped up discussion of the long-term response on particularly the current situation with pensions. We will have more to say about short-term pension issues.

Finance ministers are scheduled to meet next week. My hope is that that meeting will continue on as we examine these short-term issues, which are enormously complex but enormously important to the stability of the financial system and the security that pensioners feel and so on. So we will continue to move in that direction, always, always having, first and foremost, the interests of those who pay into pensions and those who receive pensions.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm not sure what pensions had to do with my questions. I was talking about the Ontario Securities Commission. In any event, when Ontario securities watchdogs are plagued with inherent conflicts of interest, it's no wonder so few securities violations are prosecuted in this province.

Self-regulating organizations are another case in point. They regulate themselves and act as a trade association. In 2004, the all-party review committee recommended the establishment of a task force to review the role of self-regulating organizations, including whether their trade association and regulatory functions should be separated. Four years later, why hasn't this task force been established?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Again, I want to caution the member, just remind him of a number of initiatives that have been undertaken with respect to enforcement. I don't think I would concur with what I believe to be the premise of his question, that there is a compromise here.

First of all, we have more than doubled enforcement staff since 1997, from 40 to 100. We added 16 new people to the enforcement group in March. We've issued 11 cease trade orders and 11 director and officer bans. We've issued seven interim case cease trade orders affecting 23 corporations and 17 individuals. The Ontario Securities Commission boiler room unit, which was established last year, has secured eight interim cease-trade orders against 22 firms and 48 individuals.

There's no doubt there's more to do. The member raises a valid point that I know the Legislature has raised

before. We will continue to implement the kinds of changes that we believe are in the interests of people who participate in the capital markets in Canada and Ontario.

FOOD SAFETY

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, there has been some media attention lately associated with the sale and distribution of raw milk. Ontario has required pasteurization for over 70 years in order to kill pathogens which can flourish in raw milk if it's not properly handled. Advocates have suggested that our law banning raw milk is antiquated, as new technologies are now in place that could allow raw milk to be safely produced, sold and distributed to consumers across the province.

Minister, can you explain the government's policy on raw milk and why we should continue to not allow it to be sold in this province?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'm delighted to have the opportunity to address this issue that we have been reading about in the media a good deal in recent weeks and months. Food safety is a priority of the government of Ontario. I appreciate the arguments that have been made about consumer choice, but I think it is very important that the government take the responsibility very seriously.

In order to reduce the presence of food-borne bacteria, we do require that all milk that's sold in the province is to be pasteurised. A little bit of history on this: It was the rural women in Ontario, through the Ontario Women's Institute, who went to then-Premier Mitch Hepburn—and I know you know that great character in Ontario history—and convinced the Premier of the day why it was important to reduce illnesses and deaths of Ontario citizens by requiring that milk in the province of Ontario be pasteurized before—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I certainly appreciate that the government strives to protect the health of all Ontarians, and I think all members of this House stand united behind support for government doing all that it can to protect public health. However, these same people will argue that times have changed and that things are different now from when Premier Hepburn was in power. They will also say that they have the ability to sell and distribute raw milk, and it could open up new market opportunities for our farmers. Minister, does the government have any plans to study this issue before closing the door on raw milk products?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'd like to make two points on that. First of all, I'd like to quote from Dr. Murray McQuigge, who is the medical officer of health for the Grey Bruce Health Unit, who said, "To be blunt, there were no good old days when it came to the harm that raw milk inflicted on thousands of people.... To bring in legislation to allow the sale and distribution of raw milk would be tantamount to manslaughter" in the prov-

ince of Ontario. That's from the chief medical officer of health.

The other thing I think that people in Ontario need to be aware of, one thing that has not changed, is that E. coli bacteria is deadly, and we in the province of Ontario don't have to look back very far in our history to know that. It is for that reason that our government remains absolutely committed to ensuring that we have legislation in place that will make sure that all milk and milk products sold in the province of Ontario will have been pasteurized before they are made available to the public. This is good sense.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Premier.

This morning, the Premier received a letter from our leader suggesting the Legislature strike three all-party select committees to look at three areas of the economy to help get the economy back on track. They are: rebuilding our manufacturing and resource economies; strengthening small business; strengthening cities and towns.

Premier, will you ask your House leader to start discussions to create these three all-party committees?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We welcome any constructive ideas from anyone who brings them forward. We have had a debate, as the member will know, on the economy here in the Legislature.

The Standing Committee on Finance and I are undertaking early pre-budget consultations. Indeed, I was in the great city of Thunder Bay yesterday, meeting with Michael Gravelle and Bill Mauro and hearing the concerns of the people of the northwest of Ontario, always a very important opportunity.

We welcome any constructive suggestions that can assist in updating a budget policy, and we're delighted that the Standing Committee on Finance has agreed to travel earlier this year so that we'll have their advice earlier, in terms of construction of a budget.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm going to go back to the question. I do feel this is a very important issue, as our people in this province struggle to make ends meet and continue to lose their jobs.

We've been calling for this non-partisan approach now for some time, and we're going to try one more time. We do believe that people in this province expect us to work together in a non-partisan way. We are suggesting three select committees to focus on three specific areas and to do so in a non-partisan way.

So I ask you again, Premier, will you agree to consider and take action on our proposed select committees solution to help struggling Ontarians?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'd remind the member opposite that they just voted against allowing the Standing Committee on Finance to travel and do hearings. That's where that should happen.

With respect to the three select committees:

The member opposite referred to the manufacturing resources committee. We have an AMIS program loan committed of \$90 million, generating \$884 million in new investments, creating over 4,000 jobs. That member and her party voted against it.

With respect to cities and towns, we are uploading Ontario Works benefits, saving municipalities \$425 million by 2018. That was stuff that the member opposite and her party downloaded. We just gave \$1.1 billion in infrastructure to those same cities and towns. That member and her party voted against that initiative.

Finally, with respect to attracting new businesses, the Ideas for the Future Act, in third reading—a 10-year corporate income tax exemption. That member and her party voted against it.

Their game is partisan.

This government's interest—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

INFECTIOUS DISEASE CONTROL

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. The strep A outbreak in Thunder Bay is ongoing. Why are there still no clear communication guidelines on how public health units notify Ontarians of infectious disease outbreaks?

Hon. David Caplan: I think the member has raised this with the chief medical officer of health for the province of Ontario. In fact, there are very clear guidelines to advise the medical officer of health, who will make the determination what steps need to be taken for the public to be able to protect themselves.

In the case in Thunder Bay, I know that the medical officer there made a determination in fact some time ago to issue a press release to let people within Thunder Bay and northeastern Ontario know. Fortunately, we have seen a containment of the strep A outbreak. We have not seen cases proceed throughout the rest of the province. It looks like the measures that have been brought into place by the public health unit and the medical officer of health have worked.

1130

I would say to the member opposite that any recommendations, any suggestions to strengthen the public health network are very welcome, and I would look constructively at any of those suggestions.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I just want to remind the minister that the medical officer of health position in Thunder Bay has been vacant. There was an acting medical officer of health who also left, and it is one of the 13 health units in Ontario that don't have a permanent medical officer of health.

In late November, a couple of days ago, Operation Trillium Response saw over 1,500 people descend on Thunder Bay for an emergency preparedness exercise. That's a lot of people. None of them were told that there was an active strep A outbreak, despite many of them being front-line health care workers who deal with the most at-risk populations.

Why does the minister continue to ignore the need for clear communication guidelines from his ministry to the public health units during an infectious outbreak—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. David Caplan: I couldn't disagree more with the member opposite. In fact, there are very clear guidelines. I know this member has had the opportunity to speak to the provincial chief medical officer of health, and I know he has explained this to the member on a couple of occasions.

First of all, I think it's most important that we express our condolences, our thoughts and our sympathies to those who have been affected.

The member, in her question, unfortunately says that there was an emergency response exercise in Thunder Bay—the strep A outbreak is confined to a particular population and has not spread, and for the member to suggest otherwise is simply irresponsible. I would hope that the member would not engage in that kind of speculation, because the people of Thunder Bay and the people of Ontario are ill served by such an approach. I would caution the member from taking that kind of an approach. It should be based on fact, not on the kind of idle and unnecessary speculation—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

DIGITAL MEDIA

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a question today for the Minister of Research and Innovation. The innovation agenda outlines the importance of colleges, universities and research institutions in fostering innovation in this province. The agenda lays out digital media as one of the ministry's key areas of focus, and the agenda states, "Leadership in digital media requires excellence in wireless technologies, software, content creation, broadband communications, art and design," and they're all areas of strength in Ontario. "The projected global market for the digital media sector alone is projected to reach"—\$1.5 trillion by 2009.

Sheridan College, located in my riding, provides a hands-on, project-driven program and also provides a benchmark of excellence for Canadian and international media studies. I'd like to know what the Ministry of Research and Innovation is doing to foster the growth—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my friend from Oakville for the question. On behalf of all of us, you know that a giant of the digital media world here in Ontario, Ted Rogers, passed away and we extend our condolences to his family.

But I would say in regard to Sheridan College that it has been referred to as Hollywood North. We are particularly proud of what's going on in regard to digital media. Digital media is a focus for our government in the Ontario innovation agenda.

Through the Ontario centres of excellence funded by the Ministry of Research and Innovation, I would share with the House that we have made an investment of some \$100,000 in researcher Avrim Katzman's project, which is developing real-time, interactive TV games systems; \$43,000 again to this researcher developing a facial animation communication engine; \$24,000 to researcher Bill Farkas in a project called Synderella Network sonification monitor—just the cutting edge of the work that's going on in digital media, and so much of it is happening at Sheridan. I want to thank the member—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

The time for question period has ended. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1135 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Reza Moridi: I would like to welcome Sheila Robinson, Penny Balberman and Aubie Angel from the Gairdner Foundation to the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of page Sahara Douglas, we'd like to welcome her mother, Nina Douglas, and her brother, Liam Douglas. They'll be in the public gallery today.

MEMBER FOR ESSEX

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): As well, I take this opportunity to congratulate the member for Essex as today marks the 15th anniversary of his election to this House. Congratulations, Bruce Crozier.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TED ROGERS

Mr. Peter Shurman: I rise today to commemorate the passing of Ted Rogers, a communications pioneer, a steadfast Conservative and the gold standard for a great Canadian.

First and foremost, Ted Rogers was a husband, father, grandfather and brother. To his wife, Loretta, his four children and the entire Rogers family, I, on behalf of the PC caucus and our leader, John Tory, extend my heartfelt condolences on this great loss.

Ted Rogers achieved countless successes. He started in 1960 with one FM radio station and, today, his empire employs 27,000 Canadians, many here in Ontario. But no matter how great his successes, he never forgot who he was. Ted Rogers made his mark not only by raising the bar on the Canadian business scene but also with charitable contributions, especially in the areas of education and health care. His contributions also include the Rogers Communications Centre at Ryerson, Rogers engineering scholarships at the University of Toronto, the Ted Rogers

School of Management at Ryerson and the recently funded eye institute at Sunnybrook.

I myself spent many years opposing Rogers Broadcasting when I ran Standard Broadcasting, notably CFRB. Interestingly, the "RB" in CFRB stands for Rogers Batteryless, the then innovative receiver Ted Rogers's father invented. Mr. Rogers Sr. founded CFRB to provide programming to sell his radios, but it also provided Ted Rogers with the impetus to build a communications empire, and obviously, he did his father proud.

We will mourn the loss of a great man who aimed high, who achieved so much and whose drive and perseverance were an inspiration to us all. He will be sorely missed.

SUNITA AND NEETA SHARMA

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The headlines should read, "New Canadians Win New Business of the Year," after Sunita and Neeta Sharma and their Barrhaven-based business, Learnia, Ottawa, won the Ottawa Chamber of Commerce's Gold Award in the New Business of the Year Category.

I'm so pleased for Sunita and Neeta. Originally from India, Sunita and Neeta have embraced their new country. These business owners are frequent guests at my semi-annual women-in-business breakfast in Nepean-Carleton. At their Barrhaven Learnia they've reached out to students who require additional math and language teaching with the help and guidance of experienced teachers.

Next summer, Learnia, under Sunita and Neeta's guidance, will open a world of writing, drama, hands-on problem-solving, nature and team activities to the children and youth in Barrhaven.

I want to thank and congratulate Sunita Sharma and Neeta Sharma for the great work they have done for our community. The owners and staff of Learnia, Ottawa, are a real Canadian success story.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Peter Kormos: The auto industry in this province and across this country employs hundreds of thousands of people in the manufacturing of automobiles, the assembly of automobiles and the manufacturing of auto parts, but also in big- and small-town Ontario in auto dealerships.

Let me tell you about Gillespie Pontiac Buick Cadillac Ltd. down in Welland: In business 35 years, supporting 50 employees and their families; providing a good product, good service, and active in the community, supporting community sports teams, hospitals, the United Way; providing co-op placements in their service department and in their body shop department for high school students; and employing several students in the summer.

Dave D'Amico and David Chev-Olds on Niagara Street: 62 workers and their families are supported by their work at David Chev-Olds, a dealership that I'm

very, very familiar with. It's a unionized shop. I've had my auto service done there for decades now and haven't bought a car from anywhere but there for as long.

These workers in small-town Ontario are at risk, along with the auto manufacturing, assembly and auto parts sector. It's imperative that this government, the McGuinty government, move now, move promptly, move effectively and meaningfully, to restore confidence and restore the capacity—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

GAIRDNER AWARDS

Mr. Reza Moridi: I rise today to acknowledge one of Canada's most important international prizes, the Gairdner awards.

In 1957, James Gairdner established the Gairdner Foundation. Two years later, the Gairdner awards were launched.

Since then, these awards have become one of the most prestigious honours for biomedical research. These Ontario-based awards celebrate excellence and encourage innovation. They have an international reputation for being amongst the first to recognize and reward the work of the world's leading scientists. In fact, 73 of the 293 Gairdner recipients have gone on to win the Nobel Prize.

In October 2009, the Gairdner awards will be celebrating its 50th anniversary. To mark this occasion, the foundation is organizing one of the largest gatherings of prominent health research scientists ever held in Canada. The event will showcase the world's top biomedical scientists, including 50 of the past Gairdner award recipients, 21 of whom are also Nobel laureates.

The Gairdner awards have not only helped to enhance Ontario's knowledge-based economy, they have also had a global impact.

I would like to thank the Gairdner Foundation for its extraordinary contribution to the field of research and innovation.

SERVICES FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

Mr. Robert Bailey: It is a pleasure for me to be hosting a delegation from Pathways Health Centre for Children today. Pathways is a not-for-profit centre that delivers school health support services for disabled children in Sarnia-Lambton.

Recently, Pathways had to cancel a contract with the CCAC because they could not provide the services for children with complex and multiple disabilities for what the CCAC was willing to pay. This left almost 500 children without the care they need. The contract with the CCAC left Pathways with an annual deficit of almost \$60,000.

Later today, I will be presenting petitions that have been signed by over 1,300 of my constituents which ask the government to change the way they fund programs for children by transferring those responsibilities for school health support services from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to the Ministry of Children

and Youth Services. This would allow for those services to be designed and delivered with a child focus.

Pathways also believes that they could save enough money to restore those services and provide the care that these children need just by taking school health support services out of the CCAC model. This would allow for Pathways to receive money directly from the ministry and not through the CCAC.

Children with complex and multiple disabilities need to have programming that has been designed and is being delivered with a focus on the child. The government should listen to Pathways today and change the way they fund these important programs.

DOORS OPEN ONTARIO

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Doors Open Ontario is a well-known annual province-wide heritage and cultural event made possible by our government's Ontario Heritage Trust.

This summer, I attended a Doors Open Ontario event in my riding of Oak Ridges—Markham, in the town of Whitchurch-Stouffville. Many organizations, businesses and homeowners welcomed 949 visitors to this annual showcase of our rich local heritage. Participating landmarks included the clock tower, the James Lemon House, Lionel's Farm, the Richardson Masonic Lodge, Willowgrove, the Schell Country Depot, 19 Civic Avenue, the Richmond Hill Live Steamers and the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum.

I visited the Schell Lumber Sash and Door Shop. Built in 1878 to manufacture wooden-trim doors and windows, it served the community's industrial efforts, with contributions to lumbering, milling and woodworking. There, I observed how century-old woodworking machinery is still used today. The Schell family purchased the shop in 1921 and continues to operate it. I commend my constituent Mr. Harry Schell and his family members, who have preserved the shop over the decades and, in so doing, helped to maintain our local history.

I wish to thank the Doors Open Whitchurch-Stouffville organizing committee, the Whitchurch-Stouffville museum and the countless volunteers who assisted in making Doors Open such a success.

1510

ADOPTION

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I rise in the House today to recognize National Adoption Awareness Month and to recognize all adoptive families in Ontario. I'd also like to highlight the release of a new book on adoption called *Labours of Love: Canadians Talk About Adoption*. I have had the pleasure of meeting with Deborah Brennan, the author of the book—she is also a constituent in my riding of Oakville. I would like, today, to congratulate Deborah on her achievement and to thank her for sharing her own personal experiences with me and now with the rest of the country and the world.

The idea of this book began when Deborah was going through the adoption process herself and found there were no Canadian books she could read or research with. *Labours of Love* chronicles the journeys of Canadians who have overcome heartbreaking obstacles to become adoptive parents themselves.

Our government feels that this is a very important issue, and that is why our government appointed a 12-member panel on fertility treatment and adoption this year. The panel is going to be providing advice on improving access to infertility treatment and fertility monitoring. They will also be looking to improve Ontario's adoption system, so that more children can become part of families much more quickly.

I encourage anyone who is interested in becoming an adoptive parent to contact their local children's aid society or the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Again, I'd like to applaud Deborah Brennan and all adoptive parents who have opened up their hearts to children in need of families.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: It gives me great pleasure to rise today to inform members about the McGuinty government's latest initiative to deliver high quality and accessible health care. New regulations under Ontario's long-term-care home legislation will enable residents in different homes to switch places if the move is mutually desired. The highest priority will be given to residents who are seeking to be reunited with a spouse or partner. The next priority will be given to residents who are seeking admission to a long-term-care home that serves persons of their religion, ethnicity or language.

These changes may also encourage hospital patients who are waiting for a long-term-care home bed to accept a home that is not their first choice, knowing that there is a greater opportunity to move to their first choice later on. This would make a hospital bed available sooner, improving the flow of patients throughout the hospital and reducing wait times.

These changes are part of the McGuinty government's continuing commitment to providing a high-quality health care system responsive to the needs of all Ontarians. Allowing long-term-care residents to be close to their loved ones and to other community members is a meaningful way to improve the quality of life for all.

DIVERSITY WORKS AWARDS

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I was honoured to attend the first annual Diversity Works awards ceremony, which was recently hosted by Peel Career Assessment Services in my riding of Mississauga—Brampton South. I'm proud to call Ontario home, because it is a province that displays a true commitment to diversity. Since 1967, Peel Career Assessment Services has reflected this commitment by offering newcomers various services that help them find employment and become integrated members of the Peel community. I know that many newcomers to

Peel have benefited greatly from the tremendous services offered by PCAS over the last 40 years.

The Diversity Works awards honour individuals and organizations that promote workplace inclusiveness by reducing employment barriers for newcomers. I was honoured to present Pashupati Pokhrel and Andre Iskander of Phoenix Biomedical with awards for their commitment to diversity. I would like to thank Karen Meehan and Jan Christianson for inviting me to attend this very special event, and I would like to congratulate all those who received awards. It is your commitment to diversity that makes our community great.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BACK TO WORK ACT (YORK UNIVERSITY), 2008

LOI DE RETOUR AU TRAVAIL DE 2008 (UNIVERSITÉ YORK)

Mr. Shurman moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 135, An Act to require the introduction of legislation to resolve the strike at York University by December 11, 2008 / Projet de loi 135, Loi exigeant le dépôt d'un projet de loi visant à régler la grève sévissant l'Université York d'ici le 11 décembre 2008.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1515 to 1520.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Amott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Brownell, Jim
Chudleigh, Ted
Colle, Mike
Dunlop, Garfield
Elliott, Christine
Flynn, Kevin Daniel

Hardeman, Ernie
Hillier, Randy
Hudak, Tim
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Jones, Sylvia
Kular, Kuldip
MacLeod, Lisa
McNeely, Phil

Miller, Norm
Munro, Julia
O'Toole, John
Runciman, Robert W.
Scott, Laurie
Shurman, Peter
Van Bommel, Maria
Wilson, Jim

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Balkissoon, Bas
Bisson, Gilles
DiNovo, Cheri
Gélinas, France
Hampton, Howard

Horwath, Andrea
Kormos, Peter
Mangat, Amrit
Miller, Paul
Moridi, Reza

Prue, Michael
Ruprecht, Tony
Tabuns, Peter

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
The ayes are 26; the nays are 13.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Peter Shurman: This bill, which I consider very important, requires the Minister of Labour to introduce legislation no later than the final day scheduled for sitting of the House, December 11, to resolve the strike by the employees of York University, who are represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 3903, if the strike is not resolved by that date.

The bill requires the Minister of Labour to make all reasonable efforts to ensure the legislation is passed. The legislation must specify the terms of a new contract between the university and the union. The new contract must be for a term of three years.

Although this is a private member's bill, I might take note that it carries the full weight of the entire Progressive Conservative caucus.

ONTARIO AWARD FOR PARAMEDIC BRAVERY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LE PRIX DE BRAVOURE DES AUXILIAIRES MÉDICAUX DE L'ONTARIO

Mrs. Van Bommel moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 136, An Act to provide for the Ontario Award for Paramedic Bravery / Projet de loi 136, Loi prévoyant le Prix de bravoure des auxiliaires médicaux de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: The bill seeks to create the Ontario Award for Paramedic Bravery. Currently there is no provincial award that specifically recognizes paramedics who perform an act of exceptional bravery.

The award would be presented annually to paramedics who, in the opinion of a selection committee appointed by the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, have performed an act of exceptional bravery to save or protect the life of another person.

This came to light after the tragic death of a paramedic, Paul Patterson, of Kerwood, Ontario, while he was out on a call.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I rise today to recognize that the holiday season's Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere campaign is now under way across Ontario. Known more commonly as RIDE, this five-week

campaign will once again help make sure that those who travel our roads during the busy festive season will return home safely at the end of the day.

There are few situations more tragic than those caused by drinking and driving. The senseless deaths, the children left without parents, the families and futures that have been destroyed forever—each situation is horribly unique, yet they all have one thing in common: An irresponsible person has climbed behind the wheel of a car and changed lives forever.

Our government has zero tolerance for these drivers. We have zero tolerance for drinking and driving, and we are North American leaders in the fight. Our government works with community partners to educate Ontarians on the dangers of driving while impaired. We work with our police partners to ensure drunk drivers are taken off the roads.

We are also staunch supporters of RIDE. Ever since the Toronto police launched the first RIDE spot checks in 1969, this program has been an effective deterrent to drinking and driving. It now operates province-wide and is managed by 170 municipal and First Nations police services, including 105 Ontario Provincial Police contract locations.

It has made a crucial difference. Last year, police conducted over 500,000 spot checks across the province, leading to 466 drivers being charged. This year, our government committed to help police stop more of the drivers who put all our lives at risk, and doubled our support for RIDE to \$2.4 million.

This builds on other steps we have taken to ensure safer roads and highways across Ontario. We have put 1,000 more police officers into our communities. We have introduced steep fines and hard-hitting measures against street racing and drunk and dangerous driving. Most recently, we proposed new rules for new drivers that include a strict no-drinking policy for drivers under the age of 21.

Ontario roads are already among the safest in North America. We will continue to work with our partners to make them even more so.

I want to recognize how RIDE has evolved over the years. It started as a holiday seasonal blitz. Today it operates year-round on behalf of all Ontarians. It has responded to local needs. The Sudbury RIDE, for example, also spot-checks snowmobile and ATV drivers. The RIDE the Waves program in Toronto, for example, is now targeting boaters in the summertime.

Perhaps most remarkable is the evolution it has caused in public opinion. Because of RIDE, there is high public awareness of the dangers of drinking and driving. “Designated driver” is now a common term. People think twice before getting behind the wheel if they’ve had a few drinks. RIDE has helped all of us pull together to make our communities safer, our journeys safer, and to get irresponsible drivers off the road.

Our government welcomes the holiday season RIDE campaign. We urge all Ontarians to drive safe and sober throughout this festive season.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

1530

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I’m pleased to rise today to respond to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services and his comments on the RIDE program across our province. I just want to say on behalf of our caucus, the PC caucus, that we fully support the RIDE program in all the different communities across the province of Ontario. I would also like to thank other organizations, like Mothers Against Drunk Driving and their red ribbon campaign.

Even a number of corporate organizations like the Liquor Control Board of Ontario and many of our large breweries are right now promoting on our sports stories the RIDE program and the fact that people shouldn’t drink and drive. For example, I watched an NFL game the other day, and I have seen Budweiser, I’ve seen Molson, I’ve seen the LCBO. I think it is really important that those types of corporations are out there promoting it as well. They tend to make a profit, but you know what? They want our roads safe as well.

I really want to pay tribute to our police services that are out there on the road as well. I’ve been stopped a few times, and I hope everyone has been stopped at a RIDE program, because we see them a lot at this time of year. It’s usually a blistering cold winter night, particularly in the holiday season, when police officers are out on the highways pulling over cars and checking people to see if they have been drinking and driving. I applaud their efforts for that, because they too want to see our roads safe. I think any police officer would rather be out on a cold winter night checking on a RIDE program, as opposed to being at the scene of an accident caused by someone who had taken someone else’s life or seriously hurt them.

While I’m speaking for a couple of moments, I would like to talk also about our police services, and in the riding of Simcoe North, I would like to pay a special thank you to the Midland Police Service and to the Ontario Provincial Police. We have a number of parades each year around Remembrance Day and around the holiday season, with the Santa Claus parades, and one of the things they do really, really well is that they control the traffic in our communities. I can’t tell you how important it is to veterans on Remembrance Day when there are not a bunch of big tractor-trailers or speeding cars going by, when the traffic is diverted away from the cenotaph so that people can have a special Remembrance Day service. The same thing applies to the traffic around our Santa Claus parades in the holiday season.

When we talk about drinking and driving, every one of us probably wants to have a few drinks at Christmastime or in the holiday season. We are invited to so many events. But you know what? There are so many options out there. You can take a cab. In most communities, there is some kind of cab service. You can call someone, a friend or someone who is in the vicinity, who can give

you a lift home. You can have a designated driver if you are with a group. That works out very well. And in a lot of cases, you can just stay over. I can't tell you how many parents I've talked to—and this goes back to some of the legislation that we are debating right now where young people were killed in terrible accidents due to drinking and driving. But you know, so many parents tell their children this: "If you're going to drink, go ahead and drink, but please call home. Call us, and wherever you are, we will come and get you. Or stay overnight. Don't go on that road." That is a message a lot of people tell their children or their young adults, and I really think slowly it is sinking in. Yet, on the other hand, each year we tend to hear in January the RIDE totals, and there are still people who don't get it.

So congratulations to all the police services and the RIDE program across our province. Eventually, we will win this. It's a completely different world out there today than it was 20 years ago. It's kind of like smoking: At one time it was cool to smoke and it was cool to drink and drive. Well, that's not the case anymore. Today people expect better from others, and if we all abide by the non-drinking and driving laws and eliminate drinking and driving, eventually, someday, we won't even need the RIDE programs.

But in the meantime, congratulations to the police services of our province on a job well done.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Peter Kormos: Speaking on behalf of New Democrats here at Queen's Park, we join in the condemnation of drunk and impaired driving and the toll it takes in our communities and across our province. We of course support and endorse the RIDE efforts by our municipal and provincial police forces, and we note that notwithstanding best efforts on the part of police personnel, at the end of the day it's still very much a matter of resources.

But we find it troubling, because we can't concur that there's been as dramatic a change in public opinion as we wish. It remains that middle-aged Ontarians have become increasingly conscious of the risk of impaired driving—and not so much just from the point of view of getting arrested and charged and being prosecuted and losing your licence and paying insurance fees that are out of this world, and risking jail, but from the point of view of there being a cultural shift. I despair at the fact that amongst young people there may not be the same dramatic awareness of the inappropriateness of drinking and driving, of impaired driving, and the social stigma that's attached to it.

It shouldn't be a matter about being arrested, because let's face it: Cops aren't going to be everywhere all the time, and not every drunk driver is going to be arrested. What we have to do is stigmatize drunk driving. We've got to acknowledge that unlike, oh, 30 years ago, it's no longer the subject matter of humour at the water cooler in the workplace. That's where I want to take us, to this point.

We're well aware of Bill 126, and we applaud the portions of that bill that attempt to discourage even more drinking and driving—or driving while impaired, because of course impaired driving isn't just about drinking; it's about pot and other drugs that can as effectively impair your driving. Look, nobody is telling anybody not to drink, and there may be a few of us who aren't telling anybody not to smoke pot, but for Pete's sake, simply don't drive after you've done it. That's the clear message.

That's why we're concerned about Bill 126 with its, quite frankly, less than rational emphasis on the number of youngsters in a car. We talk about the need for designated drivers, and then we interfere with the responsible young person's performance of that role, should that young person not have completed their licence gradations, by preventing him or her from bringing other young people home from the party.

We also want to say this: We talk about zero tolerance for alcohol for people under 21, and we ask, what's the magic of turning 21? Perhaps we as a community, as a province, both federally and within the scope of the jurisdiction of the provincial Legislature, had better start adopting a far lower standard, as is adopted in most jurisdictions in the world, in terms of the level of alcohol that you can drive with. It makes the whole process much easier. You don't have to negotiate with yourself by saying, if you've been drinking, "Well, I've had two drinks and it's been an hour and a half, so maybe that's okay," or "I've had three, and it's been two hours." If drinking with alcohol in your system is dangerous for a 20-year-old, it's probably dangerous for a 21-, 22- or 23-year-old.

If that sounds draconian, I say you can go to any number of places in the world where there's been a dramatic shift in the attitude, where people literally don't drink and drive (1) because they're afraid of the consequences, but (2) because it's ingrained into the driving culture. That's why New Democrats, in response to this ongoing crisis of impaired driving—drinking and driving, driving under the influence of drugs—want to talk about changing the level of alcohol that's permissible for all drivers. If two drinks are too much for a 20-year-old, then maybe two drinks are too much for a 21- or 22- or 25- or 35- or 55-year-old.

1540

We need to have intensive training, and training that doesn't just end in the first course; a part of the training has to be to instill in all new drivers—not just young drivers, new drivers—a responsibility to ensure that you are in complete control of that vehicle once you are on one of our roadways.

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Hon. David Caplan: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: I believe we have unanimous consent for each party to speak for up to five minutes on the topic of the Inter-

national Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: We're in the midst of a global campaign known as 16 Days of Activism to End Violence Against Women. It kicked off on November 25; the United Nations declared International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The campaign concludes on December 10, international Human Rights Day.

Last Tuesday, on November 25, the minister responsible for women's issues rose in this House and invited all members to join her in marking the day by wearing rose buttons and white ribbons. I observed that all members from all sides of the House were very pleased to join her in this call to action. As parliamentary assistant to the minister, I was certainly pleased to do just that. But it was not merely because of the role of privilege that I serve, neither was it because I am a member of provincial Parliament; it was because I am a member of a greater community, as are all of us. We are all called to join in a wider effort across the province, indeed around the world, to stand up and to say no. We're all called to declare that there is no room, there is no tolerance for violence against women in our communities. I am very pleased to stand with any member of this House to join in that declaration, and I welcome that.

Our government believes unequivocally that all women should be able to live in safety and security in their homes, workplaces and communities, free from the threat of violence. Ending this violence is a priority for our government. As the minister shared in the House on November 25, our government has made unprecedented investments to this end. We are investing \$208 million annually in programs and services that tackle violence against women. Since 2003, we have increased funding to community-based services for abused women by 40%. I am proud to be part of the McGuinty government. I am proud of our track record in engaging with key stakeholders in this sector. We are reliant on these partners to advise us on what government needs to do: How can we best invest Ontarians' valuable dollars, and how can we work together to effect lasting change?

We are focused on supporting action at the community level. I have seen this first-hand in my own community, as well as in my travels throughout the province in my capacity as parliamentary assistant. With our community partners, we continue our best efforts to help abused women. Through education and awareness, we are getting at the root causes so that our children can live in a world free of violence.

During these 16 days and every day of the year, let's each of us take action. Whether it's wearing a rose button or supporting a local women's shelter, it's another step to making Ontario communities safer for women and for their children. We know there's more to do. Our government will continue to take our responsibility seriously and to do our part to keep women and children safe in the province of Ontario.

When the United Nations issued its challenge to raise awareness of violence against women, Ontarians took heed. Ontarians listened and acted. I acknowledge our partners in communities across the province who are leading other successful campaigns, including the White Ribbon Campaign and the YWCA rose button campaign.

In closing, women's rights are human rights. Our province knows this and will use every opportunity to reinforce this, both during the 16 days of activism against gender violence and every day.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus.

Recognized on November 25 of each year, this is a day of remembrance and action on violence against women across the globe. This date came about as a result of a vicious assassination of three sisters in the Dominican Republic in 1960. The Mirabal sisters, political activists in the Dominican Republic, were ordered to death by then-dictator Rafael Trujillo in reaction to their efforts to overthrow his fascist government.

The speech recently given by Inés Alberdi, executive director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women, in recognition of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women was compelling, and I would like to quote a portion of Ms. Alberdi's opening remarks: "In Somalia, a girl was stoned to death, after being raped. She had turned to the authorities for help; instead she was brutally murdered for alleged adultery. In Afghanistan, a group of young girls were attacked with acid, their faces disfigured. They had provoked the Taliban by going to school. And every day in South Kivu province, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, an average of 40 women are reported to be raped. These are cases that have made headlines. Yet the vast majority of the crimes committed against women are still largely hidden from public view."

The circumstances just described tell me two things: first, that Canada is beyond other countries in the treatment of women, and that we should be using this knowledge to continue to be a leader internationally in promoting the equality, safety and rights of women in our province and our country.

Our work domestically, however, is far from over. We cannot fool ourselves into thinking that violence and abuse against women is a thing of the past here in Ontario and across Canada. In 2004, Statistics Canada reported that 198 women fell victim to homicide; an estimated 7% of women in a current or previous spousal relationship experienced spousal violence in the five years up to and including 2004; and an astonishing 24% of aboriginal women reported experiences of spousal violence in the five-year period approaching 2004. Further, 11% of women aged 15 or older reported being stalked in a way that caused them to fear for the safety of themselves or someone close to them.

I'm proud to say that a member of our caucus has brought forward issues of domestic abuse with a private

member's bill that would help protect women from violent spouses or boyfriends. The member from Durham, John O'Toole, brought forward Bill 10, the Lori Dupont Act (Domestic Violence Protection), 2007. This bill would have provided victims with the safety of a restraining order in a timely fashion.

On November 24, however, the government introduced Bill 133, the Family Statute Law Amendment Act, which I support in principle; however, this act would have repealed the Domestic Violence Protection Act, 2000. The problem here is this: The current act does not appear to deal with the need for emergency intervention orders, which the Lori Dupont Act would have done.

I urge the government to consider further amendments to the Family Law Act to permit these emergency intervention orders, because simply criminalizing breaches of restraining orders is not enough for the protection of women in violent and abusive relationships.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The statistics are awe-inspiring. They're horrendous. They're absolutely an assault on the senses. These are the statistics: 51% of our population are abused or assaulted; one in every two women in Ontario experiences abuse or assault. What does that mean? That means, for those viewing at home and watching this discussion, when they look at their daughters, if they have two daughters, that one of those little girls is going to be abused or assaulted in her lifetime. That means that, if you look at your mother and your grandmother, one of those women is going to be abused or assaulted in her lifetime. That means, as you look around this assembly, that 50% of the members of provincial Parliament who are women have been abused or assaulted at some point in their lifetime. So the question is, are we doing enough? The answer is always, absolutely not.

1550

How are we failing women in this province? That is the question before us, because we are failing women in this province. How are we failing them? Let me list the ways. First and foremost, there isn't any daycare. Only one in 10 families can find daycare. Now you ask, how does that contribute to violence against women? Well, it's very simple: If a woman can't find adequate daycare, she can't escape an abusive relationship. If she can't find an adequate place to stay—transition housing, a shelter; and there are not enough beds in shelters and there's not enough transition housing for women escaping abuse—then she can't escape abuse. Then this province condemns her to that abuse.

We can look at the Congo, we can look at Darfur, we can look at the horrors of the world; here, it's more guerrilla warfare; here it's one man against one woman in the quiet of their own home where no one else can see it, away from prying eyes. I can tell you, and we all know this, that it's not a question of policing and it's not a question of law enforcement, because the police don't want to go there and they can't enforce it. This goes on and on again. Seventy one cents on the dollar is what women make to every dollar that men make. That's economic violence and that prevents women from having

enough money to leave abuse. That's about our pay equity laws in this province.

Just to conclude: a woman in my riding whom we are all familiar with now, Bernice Sampson, and her little girl Katelynn Sampson—look at that case. Here is a mother who suffers from addiction who couldn't find rehab, who couldn't find treatment for her addiction, who out of love goes to the criminal justice system, goes to family court, goes to whoever she can find who will listen and asks for someone to look after her child, and finds some people she thinks are okay. The family court system fails her and passes her child over to people who have a criminal record, who then kill in the most horrific way this little girl. How did we fail this mother? We failed her because we didn't have a bed for her. We failed her because we didn't have a social worker for her.

How did we fail Katelynn? We failed Katelynn because when the school phoned to find out why she hadn't been in class for a few months, guess what the abusive foster parents told them? They told them that she was up at the reserve. Normally the school would send out a social worker to check on her whereabouts. The school didn't have the funds to send out a social worker to check on this child's whereabouts. Might I say, the blood of the violence against women in this particular instance is on all of our hands here in this assembly. We could have saved a child, we could have saved a mother, we could have saved a family, and we failed. So let us not pat ourselves on the back; this is not a partisan issue.

We have all failed all women in the province of Ontario. Women continue to be subjected to violence. It continues to be a violent subject. It continues to be a violent province for women, for our children, for our grandchildren and on and on. We know it's not only in developing countries where the test of justice, both economic and civil, is how well women are treated. It is also the test of our own justice, whether economic or civil, how our Ontario women are treated. And guess what? We fail. We fail, this government fails, we continue to fail women and, until that stat changes, which has not changed in my lifetime, 51% of the population will be abused or assaulted. We have nothing to applaud and nothing to celebrate. We have something, however, to do.

RESPONSES TO PETITIONS

Mr. Ted Arnott: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I want to draw to your attention the fact that on June 18, 2008, I introduced a petition in the Ontario Legislature on behalf of constituents who live in Mini Lakes Park, in Puslinch township, near Aberfoyle. The petition dealt with the need for a funding program to provide financial assistance to owners and occupants of mobile home parks to assist them in complying with the Safe Drinking Water Act, 2002.

Ellen Allain did a lot of work to get hundreds of signatures, and the fact is, I understand, that the standing orders require the government to respond within 24

sitting days. Almost six months have passed, and I have yet to receive a response to this important petition. I would ask you to look into it and see if you can get the government to reply.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That is a point of order. It's my understanding, in consultation with the table, that that response was due on October 23.

Minister of Health, on the same point of order.

Hon. David Caplan: I want to say to the member that I certainly will look into the matter. I think it's important that this place works appropriately and according to the rules.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Say you're sorry.

Hon. David Caplan: I say to the member opposite that that's not very helpful at this moment.

I take the concerns very seriously. Now that the member has brought it to our attention, I want to assure him that the concern will be dealt with immediately and I'll work to ensure it does not happen again.

PETITIONS

SERVICES FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

Mr. Robert Bailey: This petition is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care funds the school health support service through community care access centres across this province for children with special needs who require physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech-language therapy in public schools and in private and home schools; and

"Whereas the Minister of Children and Youth Services envisions an Ontario where all children and youth have the best opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential; and

"Whereas school-aged children with complex and multiple disabilities residing within the Erie St. Clair CCAC region receive a severely eroded level of service that denies them the best opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential; and

"Whereas these school-aged children with complex and multiple disabilities residing in Sarnia-Lambton can now no longer receive their school health support service from Pathways Health Centre for Children, the children's treatment centre in our community that employs pediatric specialists who work with these children from birth to adult;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately transfer funding and responsibility for this delivery of school health support services to those school-aged children with complex and multiple disabilities from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and community access care centres to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services."

I agree with this petition and add my name to the 1,300 names here.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Phil McNeely: I want to thank the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 139, Streetsville, for this petition. Before I read it, I'd like to introduce a guest of mine from Ottawa-Orléans today. Judith Cane is in the east gallery. She's past president of Orléans Chamber Of Commerce, president of the Orléans Women's Business Connection and a board member of Women Moving Forward.

"Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

"Western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

CHILD CARE

Ms. Laurie Scott: To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services, Madeleine Meilleur, has decided that grandparents caring for their grandchildren no longer qualify for temporary care assistance; and

"Whereas the removal of the temporary care assistance could mean that children will be forced into foster care; and

"Whereas the temporary care assistance amounted to \$231 per month, much less than a foster family would receive to look after the same children if they were forced into foster care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately reverse the decision to remove temporary care assistance for grandparents looking after their grandchildren."

It's signed by many people in my riding.

BATHURST HEIGHTS ADULT LEARNING CENTRE

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This is about saving the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre and it reads as follows:

"Whereas there are over 2,000 adult ESL students being served by the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre, operated by the Toronto District School Board, in partnership with the province; and

"Whereas this is the only English as a second language (ESL) learning centre in this area of the city located directly on the Spadina subway line, making it accessible for students across the city; and

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"Whereas newcomers to Toronto, and in the Lawrence Heights area, need the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre so they can succeed in their career opportunities; and

"Whereas the proposed revitalization of Lawrence Heights threatens the existence of the centre;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that any revitalization of Lawrence Heights include a newcomer centre and ensure that the Bathurst Heights centre continues to exist in the present location."

Since I agree, I'm delighted to sign this petition.

EDUCATION LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the strike by CUPE Local 3903 at York University has resulted in classes being cancelled, affecting more than 50,000 students across the greater Toronto area; and

"Whereas the members of CUPE Local 3903 show an unwillingness to bargain in good faith and bring an end to this strike; and

"Whereas York University has offered to resolve this labour dispute through binding arbitration;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Enact back-to-work legislation requiring the termination of any strike or lockout action and requiring this labour dispute to be resolved through binding arbitration."

As the critic for training, colleges and universities, I agree with this petition and will sign it.

HIGHWAY 35

Mr. Bob Delaney: I am pleased to read this petition in support of an initiative by my colleague from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. I'd like to especially thank Seamus Gallagher, of Stoney Creek Road in Lindsay, for having helped collect the signatures on it. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and reads as follows:

"Whereas modern highways are economic lifelines to communities across Ontario and crucial to the growth of Ontario's economy; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Transportation has been planning the expansion of Highway 35; and

"Whereas Highway 35 provides an important economic link in the overall transportation system—carrying

commuter, commercial and high tourist volumes to and from the Kawartha Lakes area and Haliburton;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the" government of Ontario "move swiftly to complete the four-laning of Highway 35 after the completion of the final public consultation."

I am pleased to sign this petition and to ask page Jenna to carry it for me.

LOGGING ROUTE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with logging in the village of Restoule. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Nipissing forest management plan proposes to use Hawthorne Drive in Restoule, which features a single-lane bridge and narrow and steep sections; and

"Whereas area residents have grave concerns about community safety, traffic speed, truck noise and general wear and tear of Hawthorne Drive and the bridge in the village of Restoule; and

"Whereas the proposed route travels past the Restoule Canadian Legion and two churches; and

"Whereas alternate routes are possible via Odorizzi Road and Block 09-056;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety and concerns of the people of Restoule ahead of logging interests and ensure an alternate route is selected for the Nipissing forest management plan."

I support this petition.

EMANCIPATION DAY

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I have received this from Anne Clarke, a constituent of mine in Ottawa Centre.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the British Parliament abolished slavery in the British Empire as of August 1, 1834, as a result of the work of abolitionists; and

"Whereas the Ontario Black History Society has for several years been advocating for the commemoration of August 1 as Emancipation Day; and

"Whereas there remain in Ontario many clear and visible signs of the province's early Black presence; and

"Whereas the freedom offered by Emancipation Day facilitated a Black presence throughout the province and fully sparked the northward movement of enslaved Africans from the United States into Canada on the Underground Railroad; and

"Whereas Bill 111, An Act to proclaim Emancipation Day, is the first bill in Ontario history to be co-sponsored by two MPPs of different political parties, Ted Arnott and Maria Van Bommel;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support Bill 111 and recognize August 1 formally as Emancipation Day."

I fully agree with this petition, endorse it and send it to the table through Jason.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Laurie Scott: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from the Western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre and from the MPP from Mississauga–Streetsville:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I would like to thank the members of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 139, Streetsville, and I'm happy that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is in the chamber today.

TOM LONGBOAT

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario.

"Whereas Tom Longboat, a proud son of the Onondaga Nation, was one of the most internationally celebrated athletes in Canadian history;

"Whereas Tom Longboat was voted" Canada's "athlete of the 20th century by Maclean's magazine for his record-breaking marathon and long-distance triumphs against the world's best;

"Whereas Tom Longboat fought for his country in World War I and was wounded twice during his tour of duty;

"Whereas Tom Longboat is a proud symbol of the outstanding achievements and contributions of Canada's aboriginal people;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario."

I support this, and I affix my name to it.

EMERGENCY DISPATCH SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with 911 services in Muskoka. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is considering relocating emergency ambulance and fire dispatch services currently provided by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service to the city of Barrie; and

"Whereas up to 40% of all calls received are from cellphones from people unfamiliar with the area; and

"Whereas Muskoka–Parry Sound residents have grave concerns about the effect on emergency response times if dispatch services are provided by dispatchers who are not familiar with the area; and

"Whereas 16 Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care-funded jobs, held by qualified communication officers from local communities, may be lost as a result of the relocation of dispatch services to the city of Barrie,

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety, health and economic concerns of the people of Muskoka–Parry Sound ahead of government efficiency interests and ensure that emergency dispatch services continue to be provided locally by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service."

I support this.

LUPUS

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'd like to support my seatmate, the very hard-working member from Niagara Falls, with this petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that was submitted to him by many of his friends and neighbours in Niagara Falls. It reads as follows:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no new safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening ... problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

On behalf of the member for Niagara Falls, I'm pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Jenna to carry it for me.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition is about unlawful firearms in vehicles. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

Since I agree, I am really happy to sign this petition.

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HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: This is definitely Royal Canadian Legion Branch 139 Streetsville day in the assembly, and I'm pleased to read another petition submitted by my comrades at the legion. I especially thank Sharon Thomson, George Cowan and Howie Morenz Jr. for helping me gather the signatures on this one. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I am pleased to support and sign this petition and to ask page Sara to carry it for me.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. David Caplan: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private bills.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Health is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion with respect to private bills. Is there such consent in the House? Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. David Caplan: I thank my colleagues for the vote of confidence.

I move that the orders for second and third readings of the following private bills shall be called concurrently, and the Speaker shall put the questions immediately, without debate or amendment, for Pr9, Pr10, Pr11, Pr12, Pr13 and Pr14; and that Mr. Delaney may move the motions for second and third readings of Bill Pr13 on behalf Mr. Lalonde; and that Mr. Miller, Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, may move the motions for second and third readings of Bill Pr9 on behalf of Ms. Horwath; and that Mr. Miller, Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, may move the motions for second and third readings of Bill Pr11 on behalf Ms. Horwath; and that Mr. Hardeman may move the motions for second and third readings of Bill Pr14 on behalf of Mr. Shurman.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Caplan has moved that the orders for second and third readings of the following private bills—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Dispense?

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

2029652 ONTARIO LTD. ACT, 2008

Mr. Paul Miller, on behalf of Ms. Horwath, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr9, An Act to revive 2029652 Ontario Ltd.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

2029652 ONTARIO LTD. ACT, 2008

Mr. Paul Miller, on behalf of Ms. Horwath, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr9, An Act to revive 2029652 Ontario Ltd.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

MASTER'S COLLEGE
AND SEMINARY ACT, 2008

Mr. Delaney moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr10, An Act respecting Master's College and Seminary.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

MASTER'S COLLEGE
AND SEMINARY ACT, 2008

Mr. Delaney moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr10, An Act respecting Master's College and Seminary.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

EUGERRY INVESTMENTS
LIMITED ACT, 2008

Mr. Paul Miller, on behalf of Ms. Horwath, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr11, An Act to revive Eugerry Investments Limited.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

EUGERRY INVESTMENTS
LIMITED ACT, 2008

Mr. Paul Miller, on behalf of Ms. Horwath, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr11, An Act to revive Eugerry Investments Limited.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

PORCUPINE GOLDOR MINES
LIMITED ACT, 2008

Mr. Zimmer moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr12, An Act to revive Porcupine Goldtop Mines Limited and to change its name to Porcupine Goldor Mines Limited.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of House that motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

PORCUPINE GOLDOR MINES
LIMITED ACT, 2008

Mr. Zimmer moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr12, An Act to revive Porcupine Goldtop Mines Limited and to change its name to Porcupine Goldor Mines Limited.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

2076467 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2008

Mr. Delaney, on behalf of Mr. Lalonde, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr13, An Act to revive 2076467 Ontario Inc.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

2076467 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2008

Mr. Delaney, on behalf of Mr. Lalonde, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr13, An Act to revive 2076467 Ontario Inc.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

1068080 ONTARIO LIMITED ACT, 2008

Mr. Hardeman, on behalf of Mr. Shurman, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr14, An Act to revive 1068080 Ontario Limited

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

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1068080 ONTARIO LIMITED ACT, 2008

Mr. Hardeman, on behalf of Mr. Shurman, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr14, An Act to revive 1068080 Ontario Limited.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I want to express my appreciation to the table staff for their assistance with dealing with these private bills.

IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR DES IDÉES D'AVENIR

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 1, 2008, on the motion for third reading of Bill 100, An Act to amend the Corporations Tax Act and the Taxation Act, 2007 / Projet de loi 100, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'imposition des sociétés et la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to rise and offer some comments on Bill 100 at third reading. As you may be aware, Speaker, and as my colleagues are likely well aware, the Ontario PC caucus official opposition brought forward a number of amendments to improve the bill, but sadly, they were all defeated by the government members. I do appreciate the support on a number of our amendments from my colleague from Beaches–East York, Mr. Prue, the NDP finance critic. I think our amendments were very well considered. They would have broadened this proposed tax reduction to help a larger number of young entrepreneurs in the province of Ontario; they would have broadened the act to treat far more sectors where a lot of innovation is taking place; and similarly, they would have ended the government's ideological approach on Bill 100, which would grant the tax refund only to innovations that come through the public sector. We believe in a level playing field and that private institutions that are innovating should have had similar access to the tax credit as well. The NDP didn't support us on all the amendments, but as I said, I do appreciate the support of my PC colleagues on our amendments and the NDP on some of them.

The problem here, as you may know, is that Bill 100 very narrowly defines innovation and commercialization, and as a result only a very minor part, very small in size—certainly not in importance, but in size—of the economy would benefit from Bill 100 as it stands. To be more specific, the government-identified priority sectors represent less than 2% of the jobs in the province of Ontario and only a slightly higher proportion of the wages or GDP contribution.

As Progressive Conservatives, we believe in making Ontario the best environment in which to open up a new business or expand an existing one. We believe in the ability of consumers to make the appropriate choices, more so than government bureaucrats or politicians, as to what products are going to succeed in the marketplace. We do worry that this bill, by putting so much power in the hands of the minister to approve types of innovations, will also lead to what economists called "rent seeking," which will be attracting crowds to the minister's fundraisers, to be granted the tax credit, but won't do much for the functioning of markets.

We also brought forward a number of suggestions to allow the application process to be done electronically. We felt it ironic, to say the least, that a bill that is about encouraging innovation, including in the software business, would use an entirely paper-based system for

review that can go on for months on end, and in fact would be an annual review through a paper-based process. Our amendments to provide for electronic delivery of the tax credit were rejected by the government. We do hope that they will reconsider as this bill moves forward.

Despite the obvious flaws in the bill, we don't want to discourage the government. While a relatively small tax cut in the grand scheme of things, they are actually finally putting a tax reduction on the table. Of course, this pales in comparison to the massive tax increases that the McGuinty Liberal government imposed, contrary to campaign promises, soon after taking office and since.

They still entertain, by the way, as we head into the Christmas season, a brand new tax on computers, on appliances, on tires for your car, when working families and seniors can least afford it in our challenged economy, let alone the fact that Ontario now, under Dalton McGuinty's leadership, has become a have-not province, for the first time in history receiving equalization payments from the federal government. In short, Dalton McGuinty's tax-and-spend policies have put us on the welfare rolls of Confederation.

We had hoped for a far more aggressive response from the government to grow us out of have-not status. We're still waiting for some new ideas to stimulate the economy, to make Ontario the most attractive environment again for business investment, from the Premier and his economic ministers, but a month now after we achieved the low of have-not status, we have yet to see any such initiative.

The concern we have with Bill 100 is that with this approach, in Canada, the innovations that made Masonite, Four Seasons, Couche-Tard, Gildan, Magna and McCain global leaders won't be perceived as innovations. That's rather bizarre, but it reflects the government's very ideological approach to this bill, which entirely favours the public sector and would not allow the private sector to benefit. In the private sector, some examples of leading corporations from Canada are left out of this tax benefit. The next McCain, the next Four Seasons, the next Masonite, for example, will not benefit in the least from Bill 100. We proposed in our amendments that they would. Sadly, the government shot them down.

The other concern that we brought forward was about the very narrow definition that the government used to identify sectors that would be eligible for the tax benefit in this bill. It was narrowly defined as new businesses in the following government-identified priority areas: advanced health technology; bioeconomy; telecommunications; computer or digital technologies production. While important sectors in Ontario have many leaders in these areas, as I said, that only represents about 2% of GDP in the provinces today. We believe, as PCs, that new and old businesses alike should be encouraged to innovate and have equal access to this tax incentive, but it's only available to businesses that are incorporated from March 24, 2008, to March 25, 2012.

Our other major concern is that this is not actually a tax exemption or a tax cut. In reality, it is a tax refund

that is going to require a mound of paperwork to receive. It's only available to businesses that bring to market intellectual property developed at qualifying institutions, excluding intellectual property developed outside universities, colleges, not-for-profits and hospitals. It seemed very reasonable that there would be guaranteed timelines for approvals on these refunds, but to date the government has rejected working toward tight timelines to reward our innovators.

As I mentioned, we had brought forward amendments to amend the definition of eligible commercialization businesses to include businesses in all sectors of the Ontario economy, not just the ones that the government has decided to favour. We wanted to amend the definition of eligible intellectual property to include intellectual property that was developed outside of qualifying institutes—so, again, level the playing field between the private and public sectors to give equal and fair access.

As well, we are concerned about how the bill leaves open to interpretation issues like what a qualifying corporation is. We suggested that they should expand that definition to those incorporated before March 24, 2008. There are already many businesses that are quite successful in moving products from the innovation stage to markets. They develop the expertise, they develop the connections in the marketplace, and they will not be eligible to benefit from this bill. We think that the government is short-sighted. Why would you not take advantage of what already is working and incent it to work even more and to produce even more jobs in our economy? It does not make sense to me that you would exclude businesses that have already demonstrated success. I'd think you'd want to reward success.

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The real issue, though, when it comes to moving innovations into the marketplace, is access to capital. This bill does not address that very serious concern. Access to capital for small firms that have started up is, quite frankly, increasingly difficult. It's made worse, exacerbated, by the Liberal decision to cancel LSIF, the labour-sponsored investment funds, without any kind of adequate replacement for venture capital.

Let me read you a quote from Derek Holt, the vice-president of Scotia Capital Economics, who told us at the Ontario PC economic round table, "The global interbank funding market has dried up. There is no liquidity in financial markets. Because banks are in a state of disrepair in the global economy, getting credit is going to be next to impossible for households and businesses with most stellar financial conditions in this kind of environment." The McGuinty Liberal government added to that problem when it knocked out a strong underpinning to private investment by killing the LSIF tax credits without providing any kind of replacement.

Let me illustrate this essential point about access to capital. In 2000, 283 new Ontario companies received \$1.6 billion in early-stage—often called "A round"—financing, but last year only 60 new companies received a mere \$120 million, less than 10% of the 2000 total. In

Ontario, 118 companies received investment of about \$686 million from all venture capital companies, a decline of 9% from a year earlier. No doubt this decline will grow considerably as the problem works itself through the system.

I'll give you a few quotes of what others have said about Bill 100.

Jim Milway, the executive director of the government-funded Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity, criticized the government's decision to give the 10-year tax rebate to new businesses. Mr. Milway said: "If a new technology becomes available, an existing business will have no particular incentive to develop it—even though an already successful firm might be able to do so faster and better than a start-up company could. Lowering overall taxes would be more effective. It would do more for innovation."

Gary Will, of the Waterloo Tech Digest, May 6, 2008, said the following: "I'm still opposed to the government's proposal to offer income tax exemptions to companies commercializing university-created IP—but not to other companies commercializing innovation. This may be the final relic of old school innovation theories—that innovation is something that primarily happens in universities and labs and that university-generated innovation should be given special treatment over other innovations, regardless of the potential economic impact that each offers.

"Great ideas with the potential for significant economic benefits to the province can come from anywhere. With any luck, it won't take another two or three years to overthrow the view that innovations generated outside universities and labs are less deserving of support."

Again, that was Gary Will from the Waterloo Tech Digest. As I mentioned, the PC caucus had brought forward an amendment based on Mr. Will's and others' advice to broaden those that are eligible for the tax rebate.

The C.D. Howe Institute said the following: "Ontario's new 10-year income tax holiday for commercialized intellectual property developed by qualifying research institutions is 'ill-designed.' Tax holidays, also used in Quebec, are high-cost, low-impact policies, typically found in Third World countries and well proven to be ineffective."

Those are just some of the critiques on this bill. The government has put it forward, basically, as one of their only arrows in the quiver to combat Ontario's weakening economy. I don't even know if they put this in the context of trying to grow Ontario out of have-not status. In fact, the government's usual response on what to do about Ontario being a have-not status is to shoot the messenger. They say something about the formula without taking into account that one of the main reasons Ontario is now a have-not province is because our economic growth has dramatically lagged behind the growth in the other provinces. We've seen that as well in job creation, where the number of private sector jobs created in the province of Ontario under the McGuinty government is last when compared to our sister provinces.

So the government wraps this up, in many senses, as the cure-all for what ails the economy. I believe the comments made by experts in the field and reinforced by our PC caucus members show that in reality this will have a relatively minor impact on a small segment of the economy; important to that segment, no doubt, but could have had far more impact in creating jobs, moving Ontario innovations into the marketplace and restoring Ontario's now-tarnished reputation as a world leader because of Dalton McGuinty's tax-and-spend policies.

I do hope in the time ahead, as my colleagues across pay rapt attention to my remarks, we may see some improvements to this approach going forward. It is a limited measure. Despite the fact that our amendments were rejected, we will still support Bill 100 at third reading, as we did at second reading, but do strongly recommend to the government that they need to move off this ideological bent that is, in this bill, penalizing private sector companies. They need to look at other types of sectors in the economy where great innovations are taking place and help to incent them, but most importantly, as an overarching economic rule, to lower the tax and regulatory burden for all businesses that is punishing entrepreneurs across this province and chasing well-paying jobs out of the province of Ontario. Witness the 200,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs that have left Ontario under Dalton McGuinty, including some 30,000 in the auto and auto parts sector.

We'd also like to see modernization in labour laws to encourage investment again in our economy. We certainly have decried the most recent WSIB legislation. My colleague the critic for small business has done an outstanding job in calling attention to the impact this will have on small businesses, as has my colleague the labour critic, Bob Bailey, from Sarnia-Lambton.

So the government needs to have a significant change in attitude and realize that, in order to fund key services like health and education, they need a strong economy, they need entrepreneurs firing on all cylinders and they need to take the sensible advice from observers for the Ontario PC caucus that we've brought forward in our reports at the finance committee to make Ontario again the best jurisdiction in which to invest, to start a new company or expand an existing one. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: New Democrats have serious concerns about the effectiveness of Bill 100 in creating new innovation and new economic opportunities in Ontario. Here's what Minister Duncan said about the bill:

"This bill is meant to attract individuals with great ideas from all across Canada to set up their businesses in Ontario.... It would help launch the next wave of Ontario's innovators by helping companies keep more of their income to invest and grow. It would also reinforce the critical role that universities and other public research institutes play in our economy and the next generation of jobs."

Perhaps the minister hasn't talked to those in the venture capital business who might actually benefit from

a program like that. We have, so I'll fill him in on the details of our discussions with several industry groups that represent companies that invest in the commercialization of research. It takes years—at least eight, sometimes 10 years—for companies that commercialize research in the advanced health and biotechnology sectors to become profitable. That means they don't actually pay corporate income tax, so a refund of their corporate taxes, zero in many cases, won't give them extra dollars to reinvest in their businesses. Giving a company a 10-year tax break when it takes eight to 10 years for them to earn taxable profits means that, overall, the program isn't going to cost very much all.

That explains why the costs of the proposal are so low. According to the Ministry of Finance, this proposal will cost \$5 million in its first year and \$7 million annually each year afterwards. To put that number in perspective, it amounts to somewhere between .005% and .007% of Ontario's expenditures. That doesn't sound like the initiative is really a priority of this government; \$5 million is not going to help the sector very much. Why would the minister introduce a 10-year tax refund bill that won't put commercializers of research ahead? It sounds like a low-cost photo op to me: Throw \$5 million at the sector and call it a success, a significant change in the government policy and a step in the right direction. But Ontarians see through the charade. Bill 100 is no opportunity for the McGuinty Liberals to pat themselves on the back.

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The fact is that the venture capital sector is in crisis and has been for many years now. Those who invest in new companies commercializing research aren't concerned with income tax structure. The problem is a lack of capital. The venture capital market took a hit when the technology bubble burst in 2000 and 2001. While the technology sector recovered, the venture capital sector didn't.

Here are some ugly numbers: Between 2000 and 2006, first-time venture capital financing decreased by 92%. The number of companies benefiting from first-time financing went from 187 in 2000 to only 41 in 2006. In Ontario, venture capital investment fell from \$750 million to \$685 million, back to the 1998 levels. That's much different than our other provinces, which saw a 9% increase, or the US, which had a 13% increase in venture capital investment. While Ontario had 88% more venture capital than Quebec in 2002, that gap narrowed to 13% in 2006. Some funds have simply stopped trying to raise capital because of the total lack of interest in them.

There is no light at the end of this tunnel. Before going on, it is important to mention that venture capital is critical to the creation of long-term, high-paying jobs in this province. Venture capital is about getting cash to start-ups in new, innovative fields like biotech, green energy, computing and telecommunications so that they grow into successful companies. Many think about Research in Motion's BlackBerry, for example. Retail venture capital funds contributed \$2.3 billion to Ontario's GDP annually. That's thousands of jobs.

The McGuinty Liberals' response to the venture capital crisis is wholly inadequate. They created a \$165-million venture capital fund, a token amount that industry insiders say will do little to help. Bill 100, with its \$5 million this fiscal year and \$7 million next year, will do even less.

They've taken a step backwards by moving to eliminate the 15% tax credit for labour-sponsored investment funds by the end of 2010. Labour-sponsored investment funds are pools of venture capital flowing largely to companies that commercialize research in the advanced health technology and biotechnology sectors. The credit provides additional incentives for investors to put some of their money into riskier assets. These funds have \$2.9 billion in assets in 645 Canadian companies. These companies employ over 70,000 workers. By cutting the tax credit, the government is signalling that it doesn't want to encourage investors to take the risk necessary to develop new technologies and companies that create jobs in long run. It has replaced good policy with gimmicks.

Here's a quote from a publication of the Canadian Retail Venture Capital Association: "Ontario's commercialization agenda will flounder without a steady supply of venture capital, and its research dollars will never translate into real companies with products, sales and employees."

Here's what we need to get the venture capital sector back on its feet. First, restore the labour-sponsored investment tax credit and enhance the credit's benefit. Make sure that credit can only be used to finance start-ups and target certain critical sectors. Let's create stronger incentives for putting money into venture capital.

Second, create a substantial capital pool, more than the token \$165 million, to get cash quickly into the hands of small start-ups which can turn the new discoveries into sustainable jobs.

Since 2000, we have seen the venture capital market dry up. The financial crisis is leading investors to keep their money under their mattresses. They are in no mood for any more of the riskier investments that characterize venture capital. It's almost a certainty that the decline in the venture capital market will continue.

We see continued signs of bad times ahead for the venture capital sector. Just across the street, the medical and related sciences building, the MaRS building for short, was built with much fanfare as a centre that would be the focal point of research commercialization in Ontario. We learned only recently that the second phase of the MaRS building at the corner of College and University has been halted as it was decided that \$300 million in expansion just wasn't worth it during these tough times.

Here's what Premier McGuinty said when unveiling the centre in September 2005: "Instead of sending researchers into space, we've made space for researchers. Instead of visiting Mars, we brought MaRS down to earth. Instead of spending billions on inter-planetary travel, you can fly here on the Red Rocket for \$2.50. We

really have found a better way." Yes, a centre for research may be important, but ultimately, developing innovative technology is about money. When private sector sources of cash disappear, there's big trouble.

Tony Cruz, CEO of Transition Therapeutics Inc., a company that develops new treatments for people with diabetes and Alzheimer's, located in the MaRS building, said this to the *Globe and Mail*: "Everybody's getting killed. Everything is down to the lowest levels you could ever think of.... There is just a lack of cash." Bill 100 isn't going to help the company or others like it, and the province's token venture capital pool is simply not enough to get cash to the companies that need it. And without cash, these companies go broke before getting job-creating products to the market.

A strengthened and enriched labour-sponsored investment tax credit would help get cash to the companies that need it. So would a larger or significant capital pool that small startups could access. The Liberals have decided to put commercialization photo ops before real high-tech growth policies. That's unfortunate, because the industry has put real proposals on the table, but the McGuinty Liberals have virtually ignored them all. Press releases and quick announcements have been their priority.

Now is the most important time to make real investments in start-ups. Good governments work to ensure that sustainable jobs are secured to help weather economic storms. We should be filling MaRS with good high-tech companies today, not waiting for the economy to pick up tomorrow. Bill 100 is just not going to create the jobs claimed by the Minister of Finance. New Democrats await a real venture capital plan.

I must say that maybe the ministry and maybe this government should be looking at some of the white-collar crime in this province, because it's my understanding that there are hundreds of millions of dollars that have been poorly invested by banks and by companies that finance different projects throughout our country and throughout the world. These situations are getting worse by the day.

I'll give you a personal example. I don't know how they got away with it, but Stelco, the steel company where I used to work, was undervalued by Tricap and Sunrise when it went into CCAA. They brought up a CEO from the States named Rodney Mott and his American counterparts as an executive team to run the company. They came into Hamilton, they picked up Stelco for, I believe, \$168 million, drastically underfunded—the company worth at the time was probably \$2 billion. After Mr. Mott was there and did some downsizing, did some trimming here, trimming there, cut some subsidiaries of the company, did this, did that, tried to make it more attractive and got some investment from the government for the pension situation to make it more attractive to buy, 18 months later Mr. Mott and his group sold the former Steel Company of Canada to US Steel for over \$2 billion. In exactly 18 months, Mr. Mott went back to Virginia, to his farm, with \$68 million in his pocket.

That same CEO told my fellow workers when I worked there to take concessions, \$3 an hour, attacking pension plans, benefits: "This company is going to be here for a long time. We're going to work it out."

Well, here we are about a year and a half later and we've got layoffs at Stelco. When I started there in 1974 or 1975, in the Hilton Works in Hamilton, there were 13,400 hourly employees in that one subsidiary—the main one, the main plant—and about 4,800 salaried. So 18,000 people worked in that plant. We're down to 1,700 and they're laying off again. That happened all over the city, to all companies. Dofasco, for the first time in their history—it is the Cadillac of steel business in the world; ArcelorMittal owns them now. For the first time in their history they're closed for two weeks at Christmas. Sure, there are economic problems in the world, but where were the contingency funds? Where were the funds to support that company in hard times? I'll tell you: \$68 million went to Virginia. There's another gentleman in the States who's done that in several places—Pittsburgh, Chicago—same deal, creating horrendous fortunes on the backs of working people in our province and in the States.

In this society, in Canada, you're 10 times less likely to be charged for white-collar crime than you are in the States—unbelievable. We've got to stiffen our laws, and this government should maybe be looking at Bay Street, looking at some of these CEOs and these buyouts and the things that are going on. When people are starving and they're cutting off grandparents who do all the things that they do, people are starting to wise up, and they've just about had enough. The people of Ontario are wising up really quickly. White-collar crime is rampant in North

America. I don't have to tell you about Enron; I don't have to tell you about Fannie Mac; I don't have to tell you about all the other companies.

Hon. David Caplan: It's Fannie Mae.

Mr. Paul Miller: Fannie Mac—sorry—other companies, other financial investment companies in the States. It's happening all over the place.

Hon. David Caplan: Freddie Mac.

Mr. Paul Miller: Freddie Mac, Fannie Mae, whatever. The bottom line is that these companies are all over the States. It's happening all over the world, and governments are not doing a thing about it, nothing. So maybe you should take a look in our own backyard.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? Further debate? Are there any other members who wish to speak to this motion?

Mrs. Dombrowsky has moved third reading of Bill 100, An Act to amend the Corporations Tax Act and the Taxation Act, 2007. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Orders of the day.

Hon. David Caplan: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1654.

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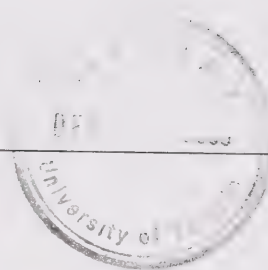
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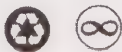
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 3 December 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 3 décembre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the non-denominational prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CORONERS AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES CORONERS

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 2, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 115, An Act to amend the Coroners Act/ Projet de loi 115, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les coroners.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I will be sharing the one-hour lead with Andrea Horwath, the member from Hamilton Centre and NDP leadership candidate. She has a strong interest in this issue because of her relentless advocacy in the community of Hamilton, and certainly in this Legislature, including her introduction of private member's legislation in the matter of the tragic death of a boy, Jared Osidacz. She will, I am sure, be addressing that, particularly in the context of the repeal of section 22 by this legislation.

Look, it's trite, we know. We know what promoted or provoked the vast majority of this bill, and that is the Goudge report. The Goudge report was a lengthy inquiry into primarily, but not solely, the behaviour of a rogue pathologist, one Charles Smith, who New Democrats believe should be held accountable beyond the mere condemnation of his conduct. Countless people suffered unimaginable pain because of Smith's incompetence, his arrogance, his disdain for the truth, his disregard for it—and these people went to jail. You have to understand, we're talking about baby-shaking cases, baby-shaking deaths. And while it's acknowledged that the science has changed, that wasn't the crux of the issue when it came to Dr. Smith. I'm loath to call him a doctor; I have far too much respect for medical practitioners to call him a doctor.

You also know that when you're sent to jail for a baby murder, you do what's called, in the colloquial, in the lexicon of the pen, "hard time," and you are subjected to abuses, some of which I'll not speak about in the presence of the pages, our young assistants here in this cham-

ber. But most of the community knows full well what I'm talking about.

We are cautiously optimistic about the process that has been embarked on in terms of investigating other baby-shaking cases and, as significantly, the processes being embarked upon to determine a means of compensating the people who suffered at the hands of Smith's arrogance, incompetence and dishonesty—although, for the life of me, I know that money is a means of compensating people, and not an inappropriate one, but certainly an incomplete one.

I've often reflected on the fact that there is only one thing worse than a guilty person who goes free, and that is an innocent person who is found guilty, especially of the most heinous crimes that have attached to them this incredible and, again, entirely appropriate stigma. There is certain criminal conduct that is so opprobrious that it does, as it should, attract as close as we come in our society to shunning, to expelling people from the community—and, as I say, it should. Perhaps it doesn't even happen often enough, because there are cases where communities are forced to live with these types of incredibly misshaped people in their own neighbourhoods, with no warning and certainly no protection.

We are eager to see this legislation go to committee. We're confident that it will pass. We will be supporting the legislation on second reading, in principle, notwithstanding some serious, grave concerns, in particular with respect to the sections of the bill that have nothing to do with and are in no way responsive to the Goudge recommendations.

0910

One: New Democrats have long been advocates of systems whereby there are mandatory coroners' inquests in certain classes of deaths. One of them is workplace deaths. My colleague Ms. Horwath, New Democrats in this Legislature and those before us, along with our sisters and brothers in the trade union movement and the labour movement, along with working women and men across this province, have long held the view that workplace deaths—I am more inclined to refer to them as workplace homicides; I'm even more inclined to refer to them as workplace murders—should necessarily become the subject matter of a coroner's inquest. We're therefore very concerned about this legislation, to the extent that it displays a trend away from compulsory inquests. The argument, of course, is that, "Oh, the coroner from region to region or the chief coroner in the province of Ontario is entirely capable of assessing whether or not a par-

ticular death ought to be the subject matter of a coroner's inquest."

Perhaps during committee we'll discover that part of the motivation is cost containment. When one understands that the purpose of a coroner's inquest—not just the legislative purpose but the effect, the net result of a coroner's inquest—is inevitably recommendations by people in the community, based on the evidence they heard during the course of that coroner's inquest, as to how to prevent those types of deaths, one wonders whether cost containment really should be a factor.

We're talking about saving lives. We're not just talking about investigating the cause of death of the deceased; we're talking about saving lives of the living. It reminds me of the mantra we repeat on days of mourning as well as throughout the rest of year: "Mourn for the dead, but fight for the living." The purpose of coroners' inquests is to fight for the living. So we bemoan this movement away from compulsory coroners' inquests.

We, for instance, think that not only should there be coroners' inquests in the event of the murder of working women and men in their workplaces, whether it's by the crane toppling or by the deranged co-worker slaughtering them—we recall the tragedy of the health professional in a hospital slaughtered by a predatory stalker, a doctor in the hospital, in her own workplace, because the existing legislation did not provide the protection that, but for some minor amendments proposed by New Democrats and advocated by all of us, including Ms. Horwath, would have given. So whether it's the toppling of a crane, the explosion in a small firecracker factory in Port Robinson, the failure of adequate supervision of safety devices or the negligence of a company that refuses to shore up the walls of an excavation, or whether it's the outright physical murder of a worker by a co-worker, we believe that coroners' inquests should be mandatory.

Look, the long-standing provision that persons who die while in custody should become the subject matter of a coroner's inquest is an entirely valid one. Whether criminal or orphaned child, whether young offender or disabled teen, surely people—their families, their parents, their children—should be entitled to know that that child, parent, sister or brother is in one of the safest conceivable places when they're in the care of the state.

We believe there should be some significant consideration, some serious debate around coroners' inquests into highway deaths. What better way for there to be recommendations from the grassroots of the community—just folks—about measures that a government can take to safeguard innocent people using our highways? Perhaps we'd have somewhat more effective policy development than the rather silly proposition, in the view of New Democrats, that young drivers shouldn't be entitled to have more than one young passenger with them in a car.

We have concerns about the bill's tendency to create a trend away from compulsory inquests for certain classes of people. The argument that, "Oh, the coroner can make his or her own decision," is a frail one to say the least; frail because there may well be cases where the circum-

stances are so obvious and beyond dispute that the inquest process can be a far briefer one than it would be in other cases. But that is the solution, and certainly not the argument for abandoning compulsory inquests.

Section 22 of the Coroners Act is, entirely appropriately, a rarely used provision. Section 22 allows the Minister of Community Safety to call for an inquest in his or her own right, notwithstanding that the local or regional coroner or the chief coroner may have declined to do so. The member for St. Catharines, the Minister of Transportation, will undoubtedly recall that the most recent time that was invoked was back in 1986, during that two-year period of time when more NDP legislation was passed than ever since here in the province of Ontario. You will recall those two years, 1985 and 1986. The trend for progressive legislation ended abruptly in 1987, but 1985 and 1986 produced some incredibly progressive and enlightened legislation.

But there was the prospect of a person dying in a boating accident. The Solicitor General then was Ken Keyes, who himself had some tragic experience with boating. You'll remember it was on the boat with the OPP where he had a beer. He wasn't drunk, but he drank a beer, and of course the OPP—maybe nothing has really changed, who knows? Who knows what kind of records Julian Fantino keeps? But Ken Keyes was subsequently burned, as they say on the street, in the revelation of this most modest of misdemeanours. It forced him to resign, as I recall—am I correct, Minister of Transportation? Ken Keyes was a very competent cabinet minister, a very competent and responsible Solicitor General.

0920

The argument made in response to questions about why this government feels it's necessary to repeal section 22, the section in the current Coroner's Act that provides for the Solicitor General to unilaterally call for an inquest, is that it has almost never been used. That's precisely the point: It should be rarely—and only very rarely—used. It shouldn't be used as a matter of course. It should be utilized in those exceptional circumstances where a consideration of the public interest prevails over the minutiae of the legislation; perhaps where common sense prevails over the letter of the law.

Ken Keyes exercised that discretion back in 1986, some 22 years ago. No coroner was about to call for an inquest, but in fact the inquest was held. The revelations during the course of the inquest were of great interest. Notwithstanding the finding that the boating accident and the apparent deaths were in fact a hoax, as I understand the history of the matter, the jury was still capable of producing recommendations to enhance boater safety. That's a good thing; that's a positive thing.

You know, the Premier's office is surely not the sole source of policy wisdom; there is many a Liberal backbencher, and indeed cabinet minister, who can confirm that. It was David Zimmer, the member from Willowdale, who by kicking and dragging brought the Premier's office to support his private member's bill that enhanced boating safety by ensuring that boaters who were caught

driving drunk or impaired lost their motor vehicle driver's licence. The Premier's office did not want to do that; they didn't.

Zimmer had to embarrass them into doing it. I remember that he pulled his early-morning CBC Radio stunt—Andy Barrie. The government House leader was, I suspect, a little disgruntled, because Zimmer bypassed channels. He was not about to stand, cap in hand, as a supplicant at the locked door of the Premier's office, waiting for his turn, which he knew was never going to come because the Premier at the time, as now, Mr. McGuinty, and his minions—his high-priced minions, his minions who are insistent that they know better than anybody and are not afraid to tell you so, the intimate advisers of Mr. McGuinty—weren't about to let that legislation pass. Zimmer had to abandon the Marquess of Queensberry Rules and, in the course of doing that, did all of us a good service.

That's why I say we should understand how important coroners' inquests are, because just folks—just folks like the people we represent, just folks like the people next door, just folks like factory labourers, those who are lucky enough to have a job but still despairing over the fact that over the course of the next several months they may lose those jobs too, just folks like retirees, just folks like schoolteachers and nurses and shopkeepers, whose lives revolve around their work, their family, their community, like any jury—are entitled to hear evidence, to draw conclusions, to make findings of fact and to make recommendations, an incredibly important role.

I look forward to this going to committee, because I think it's incredibly important that, with respect to the extent that this bill responds, or purports to respond, to the Goudge report, I dearly look forward to hearing the comments of the Criminal Lawyers' Association, for instance; I look forward to the prospect of hearing, perhaps, from Jim Lockyer, who is just a brilliant legal mind and has led, along with others, the fight for absolving the wrongly convicted.

Let me go back to that again. If there's anything worse than the perpetrator of a heinous crime who somehow is found innocent, it's an innocent person who is found guilty. And we're talking about people who didn't just spend a night in the local lock-up as a result of the findings of guilt. They didn't spend a couple of months in a reformatory; they weren't down there in Orlando, Florida, with that despicable Conrad Black, serving time in a country club and writing columns for—oh, I'm sorry to offend anybody here who remains friends with Conrad Black. I don't mind him getting six and a half years; I wish it was more—it took the Americans to do it—but I do mind his serving his sentence in a veritable country club, because in a class society like especially the United States, the very wealthy, of course, receive very special treatment.

If there is anything worse than a perpetrator of a horrid offence against another person, perhaps a child—well, literally a child, because that's what we're talking about here—if there is anything worse than a guilty person not

being dealt with, it's an innocent person being convicted. We're talking about people who didn't spend just overnight in the hoosegow; they didn't spend a couple of months in a reformatory. They spent years in penitentiaries doing hard time.

I look forward to people like the Criminal Lawyers' Association, like, yes, even the OBA, the Ontario Bar Association, and its criminal branch, people like Jim Lockyer and similarly brilliantly equipped legal minds, telling us the extent to which this bill complies with the Goudge recommendations, whether it's sufficiently responsive to the Goudge recommendations and whether or not it needs fine-tuning, tweaking, tinkering with, amendments—because we're prepared to move amendments to it. We don't see this as a particularly partisan bill but for the repeal of section 22.

The timing is remarkable, isn't it? The member for Hamilton Centre has been on her feet in this chamber on what I'm sure to some seems like a daily basis—it hasn't been, but it has been on a regular basis—calling for the Solicitor General, the Minister of Community Safety, to exercise his jurisdiction pursuant to section 22 so that Jared can have a stand-alone coroner's inquest. My colleague is going to address this, I'm sure, in great detail, but understand what that means. What happened here? You had a father murder a child and then, in the course of a standoff with the police, the police were compelled to shoot him. No misconduct has been found or even alleged on the part of police officers. Understand that a mother lost her son and grandparents lost their grandchild, young Jared. He wasn't committing an offence, he hadn't murdered anybody. He was a kid, a little boy, yet the all-too-frequent failings in the system, yes, that broad system—and we can go through a litany. I can cite Katelynn Sampson—the failings in the system. I can cite other children who, as a result of the under-resourcing of family and children services or the outright incompetence of family and children's services, have been sent to their misery or their death.

0930

But the issue here is two different stories. The issue here is what took the police to the point where they had to use lethal force to protect themselves from Jared's father. Then we have to understand how an innocent child could have been put into a position where he was slaughtered by his own father.

Look, as I said earlier, if there's any place where we should expect our children, our parents, our sisters and brothers to be safe, it should be in the custody of the state, whether it's a psychiatric hospital, whether it's a "hospital" hospital, whether it's a young offender facility, or whether it's a jail. Surely, any child is entitled to expect to be safe when they're with a parent, and we continue to fail so many children in that regard.

I will not comment on the judicial conduct of the judge who handed Katelynn Sampson over to her alleged murderers, because that matter, of course, has been referred to the Ontario Judicial Council for consideration, with the judicial council being asked to determine wheth-

er or not there was misconduct or negligence on the part of that judge.

You see, Jared's inquest, if the coroner continues to have his or her way and if this Solicitor General continues to abdicate his responsibility, will be intertwined with the inquest into the death of his murderer. That's bizarre. It's loathsome. There's something incredibly perverse about it. It's the sort of thing that people out there in the community who don't even have to know all of the details, all of the minutiae, find repugnant. It's just unnatural. It doesn't fit.

Look, I'm prepared to concede that the decision is probably—I'm very careful—consistent with the letter of the law. That's why it's absurd, silly and downright foolish for the Solicitor General, the Minister of Community Safety, to say, "Oh well, in this new regime, where the coroner declines to call an inquest, because I'm like"—he shouldn't be the Minister of Community Safety, he should be Pontius Pilate. Pontius Pilate, 2,000 years ago—a few years less than 2,000—did the same thing: He wanted nothing to do with it.

Look, the minister is the guy or the gal who makes the big bucks. They've got the car, they've got the driver, they've got the key to the executive washroom. They don't have to use public facilities like other folks; they don't have to stand beside anybody else at that urinal. The "Honourable," the prestige, the status, the power—why, then, this flight from power? Why do we have a cabinet? Just cut them an extra paycheque every month and forget all this foolishness of the pomp and the ceremony and, "Here comes the Honourable so-and-so"—honourable, my foot. There's nothing honourable about denying Jared, his grandparents and his mom the dignity of an inquest considering the circumstances around his death that isn't commingled with inquiries into the brutality of a murderous father and a system that doesn't accord that child and his family, that dead child, slaughtered child, murdered child—he was assassinated—that dignity.

That's why Ms. Horwath has been pleading with the minister to exercise his power under section 22—pleading. I've got to be careful, because Ms. Horwath wants to share this hour; I only have an hour and it's probably not enough. I suppose we'll have an opportunity in committee. She has been pleading for this minister to exercise his jurisdiction. He's saying, "Oh, I want nothing to do with it." He explains that in his brave new world of Bill 115—where once and for all the minister is provided with the pat answer to say, "What power? The Coroners Act doesn't give me the power to order an inquest. And besides, who needs that power, when it's only been exercised once in the last 22 years?" Well, again, it's a highly discretionary power. It shouldn't be regularly utilized. But you don't address that by saying, "Oh, please, take the power away." That's like the gambling addict who wants to be barred from casinos. What's the minister suggesting? He wants to be barred from using his ministerial discretion?

There used to be, back in the old days—you don't remember, Ms. Horwath; you're too young—the interdict list down at those dark, dreary LCBO stores where you wrote your code number on a piece of paper and passed it through the—

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Oh, I remember those.

Mr. Peter Kormos: If Ms. Horwath remembers it, she was drinking far too young, I'll tell you that. But there was the interdict list where, again, in small-town Ontario, you went to this dusty LCBO store. You recall, Speaker—I know you do—86B: Wasn't that Four Aces wine? But you filled out the slip on a piece of very cheap, newsprint kind of paper, and I think they only allowed you pencils; they were those little stubby golf pencils, or the pencils you used in bowling alleys. It was inevitably blunt, so you had to chew it to get the lead exposed, and then you slipped it through a grille and then mysteriously—but there used to be an interdict list. Mr. Martiniuk will remember this, because he was practising law. He, like I, probably acted for more than a few people back in those old days where they were placed on the interdict list, where they couldn't purchase alcohol.

Does the Solicitor General have a problem where he has to be restrained because he just can't control himself? He's just going to be ordering coroners' inquests every which way but loose and every day of the week and month? No. He wants the pay, but he doesn't want the responsibility. He wants the status, but he doesn't want the duty.

0940

New Democrats will be bringing amendments in committee to encourage and facilitate the defeat of that section of the bill that repeals section 22. And I say, if anything, New Democrats believe that statutory—not discretionary—coroners' inquests should be expanded and that the minister has to retain the discretion.

The minister says, "Oh, you can go to judicial review." No. Hogwash. Judicial review is to determine the legality of a particular decision. Nobody is suggesting that the Jared decision is illegal. We're just saying it's not in the public interest, and it reveals a total insensitivity to the capacity and a disinterest in the capacity of a coroner's inquest and the capacity of that jury to make recommendations. I say this government is fearful of the recommendations that might flow from a Jared stand-alone inquest because I suspect, based on what I know, that this government has failed children and failed to protect children in this province and failed to protect Jared.

Judicial review? Oh, yeah. Tens of thousands of dollars later in legal fees? Judicial review when you've got a grieving mom or grieving grandparents who are of modest means? They're like most Ontarians. You're going to say, "Oh, go down to Bay Street and hire one of those lawyers with the big gold cufflinks and the Prada shoes and the big fat Mont Blanc pen and the membership in whatever clubs it is that Bay Street lawyers belong to so you can do a judicial review," which probably won't be successful because judicial review

doesn't take into consideration anything but the legality of a decision.

I want to make it clear now, on behalf of New Democrats, that we're prepared to be persuaded otherwise, but I suggest that this bill receive public hearings not during the immediate winter break because the availability of most of those people who are going to be most necessary to discuss the matter is going to be limited during the month of January, the peak of the winter holiday season for a whole lot of folks. We suggest that once this bill gets second reading, and we're confident it will before we rise—we want it to get into committee, and we're voting for it in principle so that it can get into committee.

But I tell you, committee will be very determinative of any ongoing support. We want to hear from people about the Goudge recommendations and the extent to which the bill is reflective. We want to hear from people about the abolition of mandatory inquests among certain classes of people. We want to hear about the elimination of the minister's discretion, flight from power. This whole gang might as well just go home and clip their coupons if they are not prepared to accept the responsibilities that go with the office.

I defer now to my colleague from Hamilton Centre.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The Chair recognizes the member for Hamilton Centre.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's certainly my pleasure to pick up with some comments following the comments made on behalf of New Democrats by my colleague Peter Kormos, from the riding of Welland.

He very clearly set out some of the things that we see in this bill that are positive in response to the Goudge inquiry. I'm not going to focus on that. I think he has done an excellent job of reviewing the pieces of the bill that are long past due, in terms of reform of the system that created the horrible situation in Ontario where people were wrongly accused and convicted of injurious actions against young children.

So I'm going to set that aside and first talk a little bit about the process that happens here when a bill is introduced. A minister introduces a bill, and the people in the Legislature get a quick look, particularly critics and leaders of opposition parties, at what that bill says. The next step, before this step, before the actual second reading debate, is something called the technical briefing.

I took advantage of the technical briefing, because I was shocked, in hearing the minister's comments when he introduced the bill, to find out that in fact section 22 of the Coroners Act will be amended by this bill to, in effect, remove the opportunity of the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services to call an inquest on his own, outside of what's happening in the coroner's office. I attended this technical briefing with research staff from the New Democratic Party. We got walked through what they call an "information deck," which is a package of points that outline the purpose of the bill and what the effects of the changes are. I was extremely taken aback that on page 6 of the technical briefing, the description of the removal of this power in

terms of section 22, the removal of the ability of the minister to call an inquest, was in there. Upon seeing it, of course, we asked the staff who were giving us the technical briefing, "Where does that particular recommendation come from? Why is it that the minister has decided or the ministry has decided to remove the power of the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services to call an inquest, to direct that an inquest be held?" We were told at that technical briefing that it was something that Justice Goudge was fine with. We asked specifically, "Does this come from the Goudge recommendations? Was this a part of what Justice Goudge said needed to be done to reform the system?" We were told, "Yes, he has no problem with it."

We of course were a bit taken aback, because we don't recall having seen that in the recommendations that came out of the Goudge report. So, of course, we did some homework, and lo and behold, when we looked at the Goudge report, specifically around whether there were recommendations on section 22, what did we find? In volume 3 of Justice Goudge's report, under the heading of "Enhancing Oversight and Accountability," it says this: "The governing council should report on an annual basis to the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, and the governing council's annual report should be made available to the public"—a nice oversight type of recommendation. And it goes on to say this: "The ministry should also retain the ability, as it does now, to fulfill certain functions in relation to the" Ontario chief coroner's office, "including directing an inquest, in accordance with s. 22 of the Coroners Act." It goes on to say that the governing council would also be required to approve the budget etc.

So here we are in the province of Ontario, with reforms coming as a result of the work done by Justice Goudge—important, important reforms; absolutely. That's why, as my colleague from Welland indicated, we're definitely going to support this at second reading till we get it into committee. But here we have a technical briefing where we are told exactly the opposite of what's in the Goudge recommendations. In fact, the Goudge recommendations are very clear. Justice Goudge says the minister should be retaining his opportunity, retaining the section 22 right, to order an inquest.

So while this bill purports to create a new system with greater checks and balances, with better oversight, in effect it takes away the most important, the highest, the utmost level of oversight that is available in the province of Ontario; that is, the ultimate ability, responsibility, accountability of the minister responsible to call for an inquest to occur.

0950

The context of my concern around this bill relates specifically to an incident that occurred quite some time ago now; in fact, it occurred in 2006. That incident was the brutal murder, the slaying, of a young boy named Jared Osidacz in the town of Brantford.

I met Jared's mother for the first time when I was sitting on a committee that was reviewing the private

member's bill called initially Jared's Law, and then Kevin and Jared's Law. I have to tell you, it was one of the most difficult committee meetings I have ever had to sit in on. We had woman after woman after woman testifying at this committee about the brutality of domestic violence, the fear that they had for their lives and their children's lives, and how the systems—not one system, but many systems—in this province are not there for women, and they are not there for their vulnerable children.

We heard from Julie Craven, the mother of Jared Osidacz, the mother whose son was stabbed to death by his father, the mother of the son whose father was then killed by police as he went after the mother and tried to kill her. We sat in that room, hearing testimony from this woman, who could barely speak through her pain, through her anguish, through her utter stress at having to recall that horrific night when her child was murdered and her ex-husband came after her.

It became very clear from her testimony, and the testimony of Kevin Latimer's mother as well, that there are problems within the systems of—and certainly not making any accusations about this particular situation with Jared. The systemic issues around domestic violence and our lack of ability to take seriously the risks that women and children are put in constantly in this province is reprehensible. It's reprehensible. We heard that systems like children's aid societies, systems like bail, systems like the bail—what is it when you have the requirements of people who are out on bail? You have the—

Mr. Peter Kormos: The terms.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The deterrents?

Mr. Peter Kormos: The release terms.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The terms of release, that's right—the systems that are supposed to be in place to protect women.

Those include things like counselling for violent men, things like orders so that there can't be any opportunity for perpetrators of violence to come in close contact with women particularly, and there are situations set up where children receive opportunities to visit with the violent partner in a place of safety that is away from the other spouse but is supervised—supervised access. Failings in those systems occur continuously and constantly in this province, and have still not been addressed by this government.

In this situation with Jared Osidacz particularly, there was a history of domestic violence. Jared's father had been convicted four years previously of domestic violence perpetrated against Julie Craven.

Now, here we are, two years since Jared's death. Two—not one, but two—times now, the inquest—not the inquest for Jared but the inquest that is being held specifically because police were involved in the shooting of his father in order to save his mother—the joint inquest, which is not good enough, but that inquest itself has been postponed twice now. The last time it was postponed was, curiously, right around the time that this bill was introduced in the Legislature. But the fact of the matter is that this joint inquest is not going to be looking

at domestic violence. In fact, this inquest is not going to be dealing at all with the estrangement between the two parents, with the fact that Jared used to have to have supervised access, but that that was changed to unsupervised access, with his father. Those facts are not going to come out because the inquest that is going to be held into Jared's death, tied to his father's death, will not include every decision or detail concerning Family Court and criminal proceedings. In fact, we understand that events that may form part of the history of the situation are being considered to be too remote, too far in the past. Four years went by between the serious situation of Julie Craven being beaten mercilessly by her now dead ex-husband, Jared's father, who mercilessly used her body as a battering ram to knock in a door.

The facts are on the record in Hansard from that committee hearing if anybody is interested in reading them. Bill 89, I believe, was the bill. I invite you to read it. It's disturbing—at the utmost, disturbing. And here we are, where the coroner is saying that these domestic violence incidents, this history, this reality, this brutality that this man was capable of and perpetrated against his spouse a couple of years before, have nothing to do with and are irrelevant to the murderous rampage that he went on the night he murdered Jared.

How can that be? We know that child deaths in this province are almost exclusively—not exclusively but almost exclusively—perpetrated by a parent, usually within the context of a broader situation of ongoing family violence. I'm wearing a button today. We were allowed to wear it starting December 1. The button is in acknowledgment of and recognition that very soon, on December 6, we're going to be recognizing and pausing for the national day of mourning in memory of the Montreal massacre, the massacring, the brutal slaying, of a number of women students at École Polytechnique in Montreal, a slaying of women because they are women—because they were women. That's the only reason they were killed. They were killed because they were women, and Marc Lépine killed them because he thought they were feminists and he didn't like feminists, and so they didn't deserve to live.

This culture of violence against women continues in this province. So I ask the government this and I ask the minister this: Why does this minister not believe that there is a public interest in the calling of an independent inquest into Jared's murder? I do believe that there is a public interest. There is a public interest. There is a women's interest, and that makes it a public interest because women are part of the public. There is an interest to determine why system after system failed Julie Craven and failed Jared Osidacz, not for the purposes of blame, but for the purposes of ultimately putting in place the systems that in fact will save the next Jared, will prevent the next Julie from being a victim of a violent partner. If that is not the ultimate responsibility of a government and of a minister, then I don't know what is.

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Instead, what do we have? We have a minister who refuses to call that inquest and then turns around and

decides that never again in the province of Ontario will a Solicitor General, a Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, who's responsible—I guess women and their children are not part of the community safety mandate. I don't know why. It seems to me they should be a big part of the community safety mandate. But now, with this bill passing in its current form, removing section 22—and remember, removing it against the recommendations of Justice Goudge—we are going to have in Ontario a complete lack of ability for a minister of the crown, a person in ultimate authority and accountability, to decide whether or not it's in the public interest to hold an inquest.

What is the purpose of an inquest? It's not to lay the blame; it's to be able to make changes that are in the public interest. It's the ability to make changes so that deaths of a similar nature can be prevented in the future. We see this government finally, we hope, we understand—we're waiting in anticipation of this government bringing forward changes to the Occupational Health and Safety Act to address, respond to—a long, long past due response, mind you, but perhaps it's coming—recommendations that come from the inquest into the death of Lori Dupont, the nurse who was brutally killed by her ex-love-interest at her workplace, a hospital. We know that the same thing happened to a woman named Gillian Hadley, who was killed at her workplace by a supervisor who was harassing her for many, many months and years.

The government has not moved on either of those issues. We heard recently that the government is going to be bringing forward something. Let's hope that something includes the right to refuse for workers who are being harassed or bullied or face violence in their workplaces, so that they can protect themselves. But that won't be enough, because what needs to happen is the amendment needs to be made to this very bill so that the ultimate responsibility of the minister remains in place to call inquests in the public interest.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm pleased to stand up in my place and comment on the speech by the member from Welland and the member from Hamilton Centre. I have been listening for an hour to both speeches, and I'm glad to see the third party supporting the principle of the bill. I agree that when this bill goes to committee, it's going to see a lot of enhancement. We're going to listen to many people give us their input. Hopefully, we'll come out with a strong bill to serve the people of Ontario.

I want to commend the minister for bringing a bill to strengthen the safety of the people of Ontario. I know the member opposite does not like section 22, which takes the power away from the minister to call inquests. I was listening to the member from Hamilton Centre, and I remember that that hearing for Kevin and Jared's Law was painful, to hear all the people who came on that day to tell us their sad and horrible stories.

I agree we should do something in this province, specially elected officials, to protect innocent people.

It's important to make sure all the pathologists and the coroners in the province of Ontario are qualified when they are dealing with such an important issue, dealing with crime and violence against women, against children, against innocent people wherever they live in the province of Ontario.

We heard the member opposite stand up in her place many different times and ask the minister to call for inquests. I think this is an important issue. When the minister gives the power to the chief coroner, who is an expert in the field, to perform his or her duty on behalf of the province of Ontario, I think that is very important, because you take the political interest away from the minister and put it in experts' hands in order to exercise their power to protect the people of Ontario. And the people and the families have a right to ask for inquests, through a judicial review, in order to make sure that issue is being dealt with.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm always pleased to respond to the member for Welland, Mr. Kormos, and the member for Hamilton Centre, Ms. Horwath, commenting on Bill 115, which is the act to amend the Coroners Act. In fact, it's a very technical bill. I think there are seven sections here—I just had a quick read through it—and in the preamble there's a lot of detail in the first three or four pages to show you the seven specific sections that it covers. This comes from the report presented by Justice Goudge. I think it's important, when you look at the terms of reference. The inquiry was to mandate a systemic review. It's really looking at the rather questionable work done by Charles Smith, at that time the chief forensic pathologist, in pediatric forensic pathology specifically.

Now, the member for Hamilton Centre was commenting more about a domestic violence issue and how it applies to the inquest, and I support that. I think if you look, there's a bill before the House as well that we will be talking about, Bill 133, and that is the Family Statute Law Amendment Act. In that act, we requested, on domestic violence—I have a private member's bill, Bill 10. It's called the Lori Dupont Act and it deals with restraining orders. Restraining orders are part of the problem in domestic violence. What my bill does is something that I believe the government members should pay attention to. It allows access to a restraining order seven days a week, 24 hours a day, using a judge or a JP. That would allow the police to intervene.

There is a provision within that bill that I think is strong. It makes it a criminal offence to violate a restraining order. But how does it apply to this? It's to have the inquest and the inquiry and to make sure there is oversight within that process. That is the bill we're talking about today and we would be supportive of most of the stuff that is in Bill 155.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Dave Levac: I want to thank the members for Welland and Hamilton Centre, obviously, for their pas-

sionate and usual way of expressing their concerns about the bill. What I did hear in that, and I ask the member to confirm that, was that there was at least support for second reading to get this bill to committee and to open it to the public hearings that we anticipate we will be doing in order to get the best.

I have carriage of the bill and my intention is to do in this House as I've always done, and I committed to in the last bill, and that is to be as open and fair as possible, to ensure that the voices of those who need to be heard are heard and to listen carefully to any of the amendments that are put forward for us to make this bill an even better bill.

I believe that the Legislature has been taking that responsibility seriously and we do so in these particular cases. I would remind everyone in this place—and I don't think I need to, but I want to say it—that no one has a monopoly on the passion and the concern that we have for domestic violence, that we have for children who have been killed without answers. That's precisely why this recommendation and this bill are coming forward as a result of the inquiry.

Most importantly, I want to make a comment to ensure that I keep myself focused on this as best as I possibly can—because it cannot be done, to put your feet into the shoes of the people who were affected by Dr. Smith—to ensure that the report that was done, the inquiry, is taken advantage of, that our present legislative amendments and changes make it an even better place for us to protect children and to protect the people of the province of Ontario.

Having said that, I appreciate both members' comments and concerns that are being raised. We'll listen to them very carefully and get to committee where we can make some actual changes that would benefit the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm pleased also to rise today to comment on the remarks made, both by the member for Welland and the member for Hamilton Centre.

I had the experience of testifying at a coroner's inquest some 20 years ago and this was in my capacity as medical officer of health. The case was a very tragic one where a young girl in a group home in York region was one of the first people to have been identified as in fact having died from E. coli 0157, which of course has now become such a well-known very serious illness.

At that time, I remember being very impressed by the depth with which the coroner and the jury investigated this particular situation. Their focus was totally on the potential future prevention of similar occurrences. It was very much as a consequence of that very broad-ranging and thorough investigation that attention was drawn to this particular organism and the potential causes. In this case, it happened to be undercooked hamburger. We were able to start that public health education process to ensure that people understood that.

So when I hear my colleagues from the third party make these remarks regarding their concerns about the

thoroughness of the investigations, I would certainly have to concur, not knowing the full circumstances. We know that in this legislation, the coroner would still be required to conduct a thorough investigation of all cases. I'm hoping, as my colleague from Brant says, that in committee we can explore to the full extent how that will be done.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Response?

Mr. Peter Kormos: The question that remains begged as a result of the observation that the very unworthy Charles Smith had a lengthy career in his office—and it remains begged because the government refuses to acknowledge the issue, never mind attempt to rectify it—is, what kind of culture would nurture and sustain a Charles Smith? Was it a one-man operation? There are all sorts of levels of oversight. There were crown attorneys who clearly relished the evidence of one Charles Smith, because it allowed for and supported convictions. We have to question why this culture was sustained, how it developed in the first place, and why the government refuses to address that now.

There were colleagues of Smith who didn't challenge his remarkable batting record of 1,000. There were crown attorneys who didn't challenge it. There were police officers who didn't challenge it. And, by God, there were judges who didn't challenge it. So let's not make Charles Smith the mere scapegoat. It is all too convenient. He wasn't the only player in the criminal justice system: crown attorneys, police, judges, colleagues, other doctors—all of whom must bear culpability and none of whom are being questioned by this government. This government circles the wagons once again and builds this wall of silence over a despicable state of affairs.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): This House is in recess until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise to commend Zac Baum, the page from the great riding of Beaches—East York. He has family here today in the members' west gallery. I would like to introduce his parents and family: Kathy Hick, Joel Baum, Jackie Hick, David Baum, Marsha Baum and Joi Cole. They're all here to watch Zac do wonderful work in this Legislature.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: The grade 10 students and teachers from St. Augustine Catholic High School in Markham will be joining us very shortly.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to introduce Edith Kernerman, co-director of the Newman Breastfeeding Clinic, Lori Levere from the Ontario Breastfeeding Committee, Joanne Gilmore from the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, and many moms and their toddlers or infants who are here with us today in the west gallery.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I would like to introduce some representatives from the Ontario Principals' Council who are with us today: Laura Hodgins, Lisa Vincent, Doug Morrell, Vicki Shannon, Lona Dabouf, Ken Arnott, Rick Clarke and Mike Benson. Thank you very much for joining us.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: A question for the Premier: We know that close to a quarter of a million manufacturing jobs have been lost in the past four years in Ontario. We're looking at plant closure announcements almost every week. The province is running a deficit. Now, for the first time in our history, we're a have-not province.

Your government's response yesterday to our economic challenges was a symbolic restraint announcement. Premier, this isn't tightening your belt in tough economic times and it's not, to use your finance minister's word, a "modest" effort. In effect, it's really a meaningless effort. You're clearly not committed to getting your spending under control.

Premier, I give you one example: Are you aware of the spending practices of your appointee as president of the WSIB, and if not, why not?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, to the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I would remind the Leader of the Opposition that the announcement I made yesterday is in fact the third step in terms of what I would call the various restraint initiatives we have undertaken. It began with our budget last March wherein we clearly signalled that the Ontario economy was challenged, that we thought our revenues would not grow as rapidly as they had, and we laid out a number of undertakings, set up a contingency and built a reserve. That was followed by my fall statement, providing for another \$108 million in savings, and it was followed by yesterday's step that provided for still more that were not, as the Premier and I both indicated, large money issues but were very important in terms of tone.

We continue to work with our partners as we move through the most challenging times the world economy has seen—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Well, we're talking about symbolism here, to use the minister's own words. I asked him a specific question about one of their senior mandarins—and we know that Ontarians are tightening their belts; many facing a very uncertain future in this economic climate. We have a Liberal appointee as president of the WSIB, one Jill Hutcheon, who last year drew a

salary of \$360,000 plus \$123,000 as Deputy Minister of Labour. She spent almost 7,000 taxpayer dollars on a two-day conference in New York in April. Minister, why would you and your seatmate allow your appointees to lead such lavish lifestyles at the expense of taxpayers?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: There is no doubt that within an organization as large as the government of Ontario and the broader public service, there will be expenditures that, frankly, I think all of us would question.

I think all of us in this House need to move beyond what I would call "gotcha" politics and start talking about the real challenges in the economy.

I won't go over the luxury box your government had at the Air Canada Centre. I wouldn't want to do that.

We will continue to work with our partners, both through collective bargaining and in the broader public sector, to move toward restraint and to continue to make the investments that we need to make to stimulate jobs and growth in our—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Moving toward a snail's pace at best.

Back to the minister: When we're looking for symbolism, Ms. Hutcheon can be the poster girl for the extravagances of this Liberal government. They're cutting back in hospitals, they don't have money to fight poverty, but their appointee can luxuriate at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York, one of the most expensive hotels in the United States, and do it on the taxpayers' dime.

Minister, isn't Ms. Hutcheon's disregard for the way tax dollars are spent the real symbol of the hollowness of this government's commitment to restraint?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Beginning in the 2008 budget, we laid out a prudent, very modest rate of growth in expenditures, designed to protect vital public services. Following with that, we have talked in our five-point plan about building partnerships.

We continue to believe in the principles of collective bargaining. We will continue to work toward agreements that, in our view, protect the public interest, recognizing that the men and women on the front lines, whether nurses, doctors, teachers or public servants, continue to earn pay and spend their pay in communities right across Ontario. That's an important principle.

We have outlined more than a billion dollars in savings throughout the course of this year. We enhanced that by an additional \$110 million in the fall statement.

We will continue to take a prudent, balanced, careful approach to managing the affairs of Ontario so that we can protect vital public services and continue to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: To the Premier—and I trust that viewers and listeners are noting that the minis-

ter is not addressing in any way, shape or form the specifics I'm raising.

I have a little more regarding this government's hollow commitment to restraint and their poster-girl appointee, Ms. Hutcheon.

Premier, Ms. Hutcheon drew almost half a million dollars in salary in 2007. We would hope that she and your other appointees could pay for their own perks without sticking it to taxpayers, but in March of this year, taxpayers paid \$300 to have the folks at Auto Groom detail her car for her high-society stay in New York.

Premier, do you endorse this kind of spending by Liberal appointees?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I thank the member for the question.

As the member knows, anybody working for the public sector should always be mindful of their actions and how they may be perceived by others.

The WSIB has policies in place for travel, for expenditures. The WSIB is audited regularly by the Provincial Auditor. They do have a finance committee, they do have a board, and they do look to make prudent decisions when it comes to their policies, when it comes to their travel.

In the case of Ms. Hutcheon, I can say that she was somebody who was appointed under the Conservative government and worked as a deputy minister at the Ministry of Labour.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I guess it's appropriate that the minister responded to this—he's the guy responsible for kicking business in this province in the knees when they're down.

I want to go back to Ms. Hutcheon again. You appointed her to the WSIB. It's not only detailing her car; taxpayers paid her gas bills for weekends at the cottage, and they paid over \$2,000 in meals for her each year. Minister, is this why you personally passed a law to saddle small businesses in this province with an extra \$11,000 in WSIB premiums? Is this just to cover Ms. Hutcheon's expense account?

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Hon. Peter Fonseca: I would like to thank the member for the question and the opportunity to thank all those members in this House who stood up in favour of mandatory coverage for construction workers, a high-risk industry, who stood up for fairness in this House. Thank you very much to all the members who stood up for fairness, for a level playing field, who stood up for 400,000 construction workers so that when they go to work they know that they're safe, they're being taken care of, and if they are hurt or injured, that they do have those benefits that will be brought forward to them by the WSIB. I thank those members. For the other ones who did not stand up for those 400,000 construction workers, shame on you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Well, someone over here suggested the minister's next dinner will be on Pat Dillon—no doubt.

The Premier is supposed to set an example in this province, and he has done nothing to curb the clear sense of entitlement shared by senior government officials, especially Liberal appointees. We've identified outrageous spending on the taxpayers' tab for over a six-month period.

Two years ago, Jill Hutcheon attended a conference in Boston, again at taxpayer expense, called "Dealing with an Angry Public." Its purpose: "How can you avoid disaster when your organization has triggered a crisis that threatens your reputation and your image?"

Minister, does your WSIB president intend to use the lessons she learned from that conference to curb her outrageous spending?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to the member that as public servants, we should all be mindful of expenses, but I also say to Mr. Runciman, leader of the official opposition, who spent hundreds of dollars in fancy Yorkville restaurants, why should taxpayers—I say, sir, why should taxpayers pay \$140 for a Bistro 990 bill of yours?

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Premier—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order. The member from Davenport and the Minister of Transportation.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Transportation is defying the Chair.

Leader of the third party.

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, the McGuinty government unveiled its so-called "restraint" package. My question is this: How can the Premier describe a \$3,000-a-year pay increase for himself as restraint?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Beginning in the March 2008 budget, we laid out a number of restraint measures that were designed to help see Ontario through what we perceived then to be very challenging times. Clearly, things have become even more difficult. I think people around the world recognize that. In the fall statement, we added on a number of other measures up to \$110 million. Yesterday, we took still further measures. We believe these are the appropriate steps to take under the current circumstances. We continue to work with our partners in the broader public sector, with our bargaining agents, to find a way to manage our expenses in a way that protects public services, particularly health care and education.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Well, the question was very specific to the Premier. The Premier calls this restraint. A \$3,000 increase in pay amounts to about 10 weeks of work for someone on minimum wage and the Premier

hands himself that pay increase and says he's restraining himself. This is on top of the 40% pay increase the Premier gave to himself over the last 19 months. My question is this: How does the Premier's \$3,000 pay increase, which he calls restraint, help the hundreds of thousands of Ontarians who are now out of work under the McGuinty government?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Broadly, in terms of the challenges before us, we will continue to work with our partners. We will continue to find restraint measures that we feel are balanced and reflect the broad need of the public we serve as well as the taxpayers who must pay the bill. We will continue to build partnerships. We will continue, for instance, unlike previous governments, to bargain freely and collectively to find agreements with the unions both within the public sector and the broader public sector. There's no doubt there are difficulties. There's no doubt that families are facing enormous challenges. The packages we're putting forward, the packages we've laid out since March of last year, are designed to protect vital public services and, yes, keep people in the public service working because those people pay taxes, go shopping and help—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier gives himself the equivalent of 10 weeks of full-time work by someone working for minimum wage and he calls it restraint for himself. He's really hurting as a result of this restraint. My question was, how does this help the hundreds of thousands of workers who've lost their jobs under the McGuinty government? For example, 130 workers at Longlac industries have found that they are out of work now—not a temporary shutdown but a permanent shutdown. What does the Premier's \$3,000 pay increase, that he calls restraint, do for those 130 workers who have no paycheck now?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We will continue to take restraint initiatives that we believe protect vital public services. There's no doubt that families are challenged with unemployment, whether in the forestry sector or the manufacturing sector. There's no doubt that the programs we have introduced are helping to alleviate that problem, whether you are talking about AMIS, the Next Generation of Jobs Fund or the forestry sector protection fund. I remind the member opposite: You, sir, voted against every one of those initiatives.

Finally, unlike the member opposite, we will not impose freezes on our public servants. We will not impose freezes on the broader public sector. We don't believe in stripping collective agreements; we don't believe in that approach. As we said, as part of our five-point plan we will continue to work with our partners. Our partners include the unions that represent our employees and the unions that represent employees in the broader public sector and in the education sector. That's the balanced, right, prudent approach in difficult times, with a plan that will do more to help people through the challenging times.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Howard Hampton: Again to the Premier: I'm not surprised that the Premier doesn't want to answer the questions about his own \$3,000 pay increase, which he calls restraint. But my question is this: Premier, we have seen hospital after hospital cutting nurses, cutting hospital services and cutting hospital workers. The latest today is Burlington's Joseph Brant hospital, which is cutting another 25 positions because of chronic underfunding from the McGuinty government. How does the Premier's \$3,000 pay increase, which he calls restraint, help that hospital and those 25 hospital workers who are now out of work?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Thank you very much. I'm pleased to take the opportunity to speak to this issue. I know that the members opposite raised the issue of health care funding. Again, just for purposes of accuracy, which I find is always helpful in this place, we have increased funding overall for health care in the past five years by some 37%. Hospitals have received increases of funding that total over 30%. The fact of the matter is that there have been dramatic new increases in funding for virtually every aspect of our health care sector and new aspects which had not been funded in the past. We have more doctors, we have more nurses and we have shorter wait times as a result of those investments. That's the truth. There is now more money for health care, including hospitals, than ever before.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier says there is more money for hospitals. Under the McGuinty government, more of the health budget is going to profit-driven Bay Street corporations, which are more involved in the health care system under the McGuinty government than ever before in the history of Ontario. That's what's really happening.

But again, the Premier fails to answer the question: How does his \$3,000 pay increase, which he calls restraint, help all those health care workers and hospital workers who are being laid off at hospital after hospital across the province? But more than that, while the Premier says he's restraining himself, we find more children in Ontario living in poverty and we find more children in Ontario being forced to go to food banks. How does the \$3,000 pay increase the Premier gave to himself, which he calls restraint, help those kids who have to go to a food bank and those kids who are more and more forced into poverty?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: A few things—there was so much raised in that particular question. One is, my friend is mired in an old ideological swamp that says that you can't enlist the support of the private sector when it comes to building more hospitals more quickly to meet the needs of Ontario families. I'm not prepared to support that kind of argument.

With respect to help for our children, I know that my honourable colleague is looking very much forward to the announcement that we're going to be making tomorrow.

row. The fact of the matter is, we're going to move forward. We'll take a decided step. It will be a progressive step when it comes to providing more support for our children growing up in poverty in the province of Ontario. I've said before that it's one thing to lend a hand to poor kids in good times, but it's particularly challenging to do so in challenging times. Notwithstanding our times, we will find a way to move forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier was so challenged, he gave himself a \$3,000 pay increase on top of the 40% pay increase he's given himself over the last 19 months. Obviously, Premier, you can't be too challenged when you can find that kind of money for those kinds of pay increases for yourself and every other MPP.

Again, I return to the question. How does this so-called restraint package, which is very much a phony restraint package—I think that's obvious to everyone—help the hundreds of thousands who are unemployed in Ontario? How does that help people who are struggling on a minimum wage that is less than a living wage? How does that help kids, more and more of whom are living in poverty? How does that help kids, more and more of whom are being forced to go to food banks? How does any of this so-called restraint package—phony restraint package—do anything—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that my honourable colleague does understand, although he's not prepared to demonstrate that today, that we have been pursuing prudence and responsible management of the people's finances for five years now. In our first mandate, we found over \$800 million in savings. As the Minister of Finance mentioned a moment ago, in our recent fall economic statement we indicated we'll find another \$108 million in savings in there.

Yesterday, there was also another announcement, and we indicated that it would be somewhat modest given the numbers that we are dealing with, but we are not prepared to do what my friend wants us to do. He wants us to impose a wage freeze on our public service and the broader public sector. I'm not prepared to do that. We are at the table; we are engaged in collective bargaining. We will pursue that responsibly both on behalf of those people with whom we are privileged to work and on behalf of taxpayers, the people whom we all work for.

MINISTRY SPENDING

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Minister of Government Services. Why did the minister authorize \$108,000 in hotel spending at Canada's most luxurious hotel, the Fairmont Royal York, during the 2008 recession?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'd appreciate a few more details from the member with respect to the specific expenditure that she's talking about. We, of course, have

a process—excuse my voice—in government traditionally, where we're looking at facilities or whatever, where we take bids for various services that are available. We do that in a clear and transparent way and we do the best to contain the costs whenever we can.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: So he didn't know the question, but he apparently joins John Cusack, Bill Clinton and Queen Elizabeth II as one of the most famous guests at the Royal York Hotel. Spending \$108,000 at the Royal York Hotel during a recession is a blatant misuse of taxpayer dollars. Still more upsetting, if he would like more details: His hotel and conference budget grew by 78% in the last year over the year previously, during a recession, to half a million dollars. It's outrageous.

Can the minister tell the Ontario public why, at a time when taxpayers are tightening their belts, his department is opening up the purse strings for stays at the Royal York Hotel and other luxury hotels in this province?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: We're absolutely committed, in our ministry, to prudent and responsible fiscal management—I hope Hansard's picking this up. Our annual engagement sessions for staff and managers take place all across Ontario in various places, and they're chosen only after carefully comparing multiple locations based on pricing, facilities, services received and past experience at the venue that's being used.

That's my response to a general question. I still haven't heard any specifics from the honourable member.

BREASTFEEDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the Premier. Can the Premier explain to the breastfeeding women in the gallery and to all Ontarians why Ontario is one of only two provinces without a breastfeeding strategy, when research has shown that breastfeeding lowers health care costs, improves health outcomes for both moms and babies, and is recognized worldwide as the perfect food for infants?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health Promotion.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: First of all, I'd like to thank the member opposite for the question. I certainly would like to take this opportunity to welcome all the mothers who are in the Legislature today with all those beautiful babies. Welcome.

I would like to also say that as a mother of three children, I certainly understand the need to support all mothers during this very important step of life. We continue to provide Ontarians with support they need to raise their children to become healthy, active adults. I am a mother who breast-fed my children and certainly appreciate the importance of breastfeeding. I feel privileged to be part of a government that not only understands this issue, but supports it with programs. This government introduced the Motherisk program at the Hospital for Sick Children to support—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: We want the province to commit to a breastfeeding strategy. It is the first step in meeting the WHO and UNICEF Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative. Did you know that only two hospitals in Ontario, two local health units and one community health centre have achieved this status? Most public health units are only able to provide a limited amount of help to breastfeeding mothers. The stats speak for themselves: 90% of women want to breastfeed; 20% succeed.

This is not enough. Women need more support in order to do what's best for their babies. The mothers and babies who are with us today in the gallery want to know, why is it that Ontario continues to treat women's and children's health as not worthy of investment?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Again, I want to say that we certainly support all mothers who want to breastfeed their children. We understand the importance of healthy children and how important breastfeeding is to that, and we want to continue to work with our mothers, with communities and also with the member opposite. I certainly am willing to sit down with her to talk about this issue and find ways in which we can continue to support our mothers, our infants and our children—these beautiful children who are here today and all the children in Ontario.

We certainly feel that it is our privilege to be able to help to support breastfeeding. Breastfeeding is such an important step in the life of a mother and her child, and we want to ensure that this important step is supported and continued. We also brought in the Ontario midwifery program, which includes breastfeeding instruction with midwife support. In addition, our Telehealth line links mothers to registered nurses who can answer questions and provide advice regarding this very important stage in a mother's and an infant's life—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

1100

PEDIATRIC FORENSIC PATHOLOGY INQUIRY

Mr. Bill Mauro: It's now been two months since Justice Stephen Goudge made his recommendations on pediatric forensic pathology in the wake of the terrible tragedies caused by the work of Dr. Charles Smith. At that time, the Attorney General committed to develop a compensation framework for those who suffered injustice and to establish a medical-legal review of convictions involving shaken baby deaths.

My question is for the Attorney General: What steps have been taken to act on these commitments?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I thank the member for the question. I know the members of the House and all parties are very thankful to Justice Goudge for the important work that he did, and determined to make sure that we move forward and remove the shadow of suspicion or right injustices where they've occurred.

Yesterday, I announced the formation of two teams to proceed with two of Justice Goudge's recommendations.

One, he recommended that the province determine if we could set up a viable compensation framework for those who had been affected by Dr. Smith's work.

I'm pleased that former Associate Chief Justice of Ontario Coulter Osborne, Bonnie Tough, who's a civil litigator, and Michele Smith from our ministry have agreed to set up that team. We also set up a medical-legal team to review all of the shaken baby cases, and I will speak about—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I thank the Attorney General for that update.

I was wondering if the Attorney General could elaborate further on the steps ahead as he sees them. I would like to know what kind of work the Dr. Smith compensation framework advice committee and the Shaken-Baby death review team will be doing over the coming months. Would the AG be able to tell us what steps are ahead?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The team with respect to the so-called shaken baby cases—let's be clear. There are 142 cases that are going to be reviewed. Nobody is suggesting that anything at the time of their disposition through the court process was incorrect. The issue that Justice Goudge identified is that the science has evolved. So we want to make sure that we all got it right.

We've got a medical-legal team. Former Associate Chief Justice of the Ontario Court of Justice Donald Ebbs is going to be joined by Marie Henein, a defence counsel; Mary Nethery of the ministry; Dr. Michael Pollanen, Ontario's chief forensic pathologist; and Dr. Dirk Huyer, regional supervising coroner. What they're going to be doing, similar to what was done in Great Britain several years ago, is be reviewing all of these to see if any require further investigation. We want to make sure that we got it right.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Premier. Premier, yesterday you announced a hiring freeze on full-time positions in your government and the Ontario public service, claiming that Ontario has to tighten its belt. Apparently, that does not apply to you, as you just recently hired a sixth—yes, a sixth—communications adviser at over \$80,000 a year. Perhaps you feel your image needs improvement or maybe another staffer can find a positive spin on Ontario being a have-not province. Either way, you must be thrilled that you were able to squeeze in yet one more full-time employee before your announcement.

Can you please explain to Ontarians why you need another communications adviser, and why taxpayers are footing the bill for more staff in the Premier's office, when so many around the province have no job at all?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Of course, I have an office budget, and we exercise our discretion in the most responsible fashion possible. I think my friend does not

have the benefit of having been here during the course of the previous government, and he might want to check out—I think it was Gord Haugh. I can't recall the exact figure—

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: —\$350,000 comes to mind. I think if we were to make those kinds of comparisons, an objective observer would come to the conclusion that we continue to act responsibly and with prudence, especially given our circumstances.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Perhaps the Premier wants to deal in the past. I want to deal in the present. Premier, your answer only shows that you are more interested in spinning your message than leading by example and showing real restraint in your own spending, more interested in spinning your message than helping Ontarians put food on the table. Premier, is this new communications adviser also going to get the 1.5% pay raise announced yesterday or will you finally practise what you preach and trim your bloated office staff?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: In terms of office spending overall, between 2006-07 and 2007-08, on a budget that is about \$2.9 million, I think it went up about \$11,000 year over year. I need to confirm this, but I think the honourable colleague is talking about our replacing someone who is on maternity leave. I think that's what we are talking about but I'll look to confirm that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Premier: Would he please explain why world-renowned scientist David Suzuki quit his voluntary role in the government's powerWISE energy conservation advertising campaign?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to say to the honourable member that yesterday was a day when I was privileged to participate with Dr. Suzuki and the alliance around the green energy act to see diaries from his summer events. I spoke with him on the phone yesterday, as did the Premier. I think that all of the people in Ontario can look forward very soon to two new David Suzuki ads on the powerWISE campaign as part of the continuing series.

But the honourable member raises a legitimate point, for sure. We have some work to do to convince Dr. Suzuki to continue to play that role, but I'm pretty confident of it. We demonstrated last night, point on point, our desire to work alongside those at the alliance of the green energy act to enhance further Ontario's adoption of renewable energy, a primary concern of Dr. Suzuki and one that we share.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Last night at a public forum, Dr. Suzuki said to Minister Smitherman: "When ... you said that nuclear is non-negotiable and [you were] building ... two new plants, I quit powerWISE. I said that's it for me. And I regret it because those were really powerful ads. [But] it became clear that the government didn't give a shit about showing that you could actually reduce"—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I remind the honourable member that she cannot say indirectly what you are prohibited from saying directly. I would ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker, but Dr. Suzuki doesn't. Why won't the Premier listen to Dr. Suzuki and put a hold on building costly non-renewable nuclear plants until the government has fully pursued the untapped potential for conservation and renewable energy in Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman: Maybe if the honourable member had taken the time to participate in the forum—she didn't; she wasn't there—she also would have laid out any one of the number of quotes that Dr. Suzuki offered which are extraordinarily positive about the efforts we've undertaken. At the heart of the matter we do have an honest difference of opinion. We do believe, in the province of Ontario, that nuclear energy, which has been providing around 50% of our base load energy for decades now, continues to be a necessity in Ontario. We're going to continue to work with Dr. Suzuki, with the alliance and the green energy act to enhance Ontario's opportunities for the adoption of renewable energy. I do recommend to the honourable member that, instead of taking only one comment that suits her needs, she take the opportunity to learn a little about all the things that were discussed last night. I think it was an informative discussion overall.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mrs. Van Bommel: My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. I understand that you recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the Anishinabek Nation of Ontario to establish a bilateral round table. Some of the communities that are located in my riding are members of the Anishinabek nation, and I appreciate how significant an agreement like that is to them. Generation after generation, governments have failed to make significant progress in improving opportunities and the quality of life for our First Nations and Metis. Would the minister tell us how memorandums of understanding like the one that he just signed contribute to improving opportunities for aboriginal communities?

1110

Hon. Brad Duguid: I thank the member for the question, and I thank her for her advice and guidance as she works with First Nations communities within her riding as well.

The Anishinabek round table will provide us with an historic opportunity to work together, government to

government, to discuss issues of mutual concern related to health, social services, education, lands, resources and many other issues.

This agreement helps cement the bond between the Anishinabek Nation and the government of Ontario, but there's a personal side to this as well: It cements the bond between me, as Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, and Grand Chief Beaucage. Grand Chief Beaucage is a visionary leader who has shown real leadership on social issues such as substance abuse prevention and enhancing economic development opportunities for First Nations communities.

We are making historic gains in building a strong relationship with the First Nations, Metis and Inuit people of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I'm confident that you will not let this House lose sight of the importance of the work that we still have to do in conjunction with our Metis and First Nations partners.

The efforts of this government have been making an important relationship with aboriginal people in Ontario and are certainly evident in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex.

In addition to the creation of the Anishinabek round table, I know that the transfer of Ipperwash Provincial Park to the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation is currently being worked on. Minister, could you please tell us more about this initiative?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Absolutely. I'm looking forward to visiting the member's riding soon to meet with the Kettle and Stony Point First Nation and spend some time in beautiful Ipperwash park.

We've established a joint Ipperwash park resolution table with the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation and the residents of Aazhoodena, the First Nation members who reside at Camp Ipperwash and Ipperwash park. The resolution table is developing an interim plan with the local community to determine how the land will be used and managed until the transfer of the park is completed. This government is acting on the recommendations of the Ipperwash inquiry and we're building stronger relationships.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who worked so hard to make all of this possible, in particular Sam George. His demonstration of courage and perseverance makes him a role model not only for the First Nations communities, but all Ontarians.

I welcome all members to join us this afternoon as we present a member's—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

MINISTRY SPENDING

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: My question is to the Minister of Education. Minister, at a time of fiscal uncertainty, you and your ministry refuse to tighten your belts. You're spending almost \$10,000 a day on hotels, and

there's no sign of stopping. Minister, can you tell Ontarians why you are cutting \$25 million from their school repair budget when you increased your hotel and conference budget by 45.6% in one year?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The reality is that in order to provide professional development opportunities, in order to be able to provide training opportunities, and in order, right now, to deal with labour issues, we need to have space in which those conversations can happen.

We are a government that has worked with people in the sector, with teachers, with education assistants, with principals, to make sure that they have the opportunities to come together, to share their learnings, and to improve the learning opportunities for kids in schools. That takes time, and it takes opportunities for people to come together.

The reality is that there is not always a government room available for that kind of interaction, so those hotel costs are incurred in aid of those kinds of labour and training—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: We've known for two years, Minister, that we have been heading into very turbulent economic times, and restraint should have been part of the plan. The answers that you're giving to the question today don't show any of that priority-setting. Your refusal to rein in your spending during tough times is really an affront to the hard-working taxpayers of Ontario who are losing their jobs and finding themselves in very unfortunate, difficult, challenging times. They're being asked to tighten their belts, but the Premier is telling them to go out and spend, spend more money. Imagine what that accommodation money could do in a classroom.

Minister, will you acknowledge that your financial priorities are not where they should be and address the fiscal mismanagement in your ministry now?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Here's what I'll acknowledge: What we're committed to is improving the learning of our teachers, improving the learning of our students and improving the opportunities for professional development for all of our education workers.

When I look at 2001-02, \$311,000 was spent at just two Toronto hotels by the Ministry of Education under that government's watch. The priority then had nothing to do with professional development for teachers. It had nothing to do with improved conditions for students. It had nothing to do with high-quality, publicly funded education. On this side of the House, we believe in high-quality, publicly funded education. We believe in better conditions for our kids in our schools, better learning opportunities.

The members opposite are on record as believing in private education. They are not champions of publicly funded education, so I wouldn't expect them to understand that we need—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. I've raised the issue of temporary care assistance funding in this House many times. The minister's responses have attempted to muddy the issue, wrongly accusing me of calling for means-testing, calling for elimination of the program, calling me a whistle-blower. This minister needs to remember that it was the grandparents who came to speak with her and raise their issues and that I have helped them by bringing their issues to this House.

It's almost Christmas. Will the minister respond to the season and direct that another memorandum be sent out to ensure temporary care assistance eligibility for all at-risk grandchildren? Merry Christmas.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, this member is trying to scare grandparents and every other individual who is taking care of grandchildren. This government is supporting these grandparents. We have met with grandparents many, many times, and I'm always open to meet with them.

But they all came to me with information that they received from this member—information that was wrong. Even general manager Joe-Anne Priel from Hamilton is supporting what the government here is doing. She is saying that the way that Hamilton is looking after these cases is on an individual basis. There's no time limit. The rule that she is following now is the rule that she was following last—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: Stay tuned. I'll be calling the minister on those accusations.

When the grandparents of ROCK, Raising Our Children's Kids, met with the minister in June, they asked that those families cut off since 2004 be reinstated and that those whose applications have not been accepted since 2004 be accepted. Rather than address the basic issue, the ministry issued punitive new eligibility criteria, causing huge upset for these at-risk children.

Will the minister turn her attention to the actual request from that June meeting and issue a directive clearly stating that those families cut off from TCA since 2004 be reinstated and those applications not accepted since 2004 now be accepted?

1120

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, we have two notes here: one from the Peterborough OW administrator, and this time from the Hamilton administrator, that the rules have not been changed. The rules that they are following are the same rules that they were following before. Again she said here: "It should be noted that province-wide, the city of Hamilton has one of the highest ratios of active temporary care per capita. The number of temporary care cases has remained consistent at approximately 260 cases or 3%"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment that I believe I heard.

Mr. Paul Miller: What was that, Mr. Speaker? What did you hear? I didn't say anything wrong, Mr. Speaker. What did I say? Would you please tell me what I said?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Would you just withdraw the comment, please?

Mr. Paul Miller: I don't know what I'm supposed to withdraw. What did I—I don't know what I said.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Unparliamentary language that I believe you said under your breath.

Mr. Paul Miller: Mr. Speaker, I think you're picking on me, but I'll withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

USE OF TASERS

Mr. Khalil Ramal: My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Many of my constituents of London-Fanshawe have expressed concern over the use of tasers by police services in Ontario. These are concerns that I share. As the number of these types of weapons has increased in police forces across the province and the country, questions have been raised about the procedures surrounding their use, the qualifications needed for an officer to carry one and the training required to use one safely.

I recognize that police officers have a very difficult and challenging job, and I know I speak for all members when I express my appreciation for their commitment to public safety. However, I need to ask the minister, what safeguards are in place to ensure the proper usage of and training for tasers in Ontario?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: There is absolutely no question that we have to ensure that Ontarians feel safe. We have to take every measure possible to ensure that happens. Many of my constituents have expressed concerns with regard to the use of tasers as well.

There are a number of types of weapons that have been included in police forces across Ontario. The taser is an option for the police officer to use. It is an option to lethal use of force, and we understand that police officers have limited usage of tasers; they go to front-line supervisors or they go to critical response teams. In the event that a police officer has to use a taser, there is a requirement for him or her to file a full report.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I want to thank the minister for his response. What I'm wondering is whether or not the minister has plans to evaluate the policies and procedures currently in place for officers to carry these types of devices.

I know that the RCMP public complaints commission just this year completed their study into the use of tasers by the RCMP and made several recommendations with respect to training and policies for police forces. Can the

minister advise the House and tell us if he is putting something in place similar to the RCMP in order to make sure the people of Ontario are safe and the police are using all this equipment in a professional way?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Speaker, he should feel very comfortable that, yes, indeed, my ministry is undergoing a review of tasers. We're doing that in conjunction with our policing partners, with our police standards experts and with our municipalities. This review began earlier this year. We're hoping that the review will be finished some time in the new year. This review will certainly look at best practices, not only in Ontario and across North America but also in the United Kingdom.

At the end of the day, we want to ensure that Ontario is the model for the way tasers are used. We are proud of the oversight and the accountability that is in place now, and we want to build on that strategy.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier: At the end of the day yesterday, your finance minister dribbled out a rather meagre, so-called restraint package. But let's look at your overall record, Premier.

As you know, the McGuinty government has added more jobs to government payroll than all of the other provinces combined. Under the McGuinty government, the sunshine list bloated by some 27% last year, to the point where now the number of government workers on the sunshine list of \$100,000 or over is equal to the size of the city of Welland, and there are currently 154 job postings online worth \$11 million in salaries.

Premier, given that record, shouldn't your minister have done something significant rather than simply symbolic?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: As the Minister of Finance has indicated, this was only the third step in a series of ongoing measures to demonstrate restraint on behalf of Ontario taxpayers. I don't know if my colleague is suggesting that we lay off those nurses, those MRI/CT technologists, the personal support workers, the home care workers, the public health unit inspectors, the water inspectors, the meat inspectors, the labour inspectors, the teachers, the librarians, the guidance counsellors, the youth workers, the autism therapists, the police officers and the many others whom we've now hired. Is he now recommending that we let those people go?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'd actually like to see him go after his new kingdom of spin doctors, to the Premier with the largest entourage in the history of the province of Ontario, that follows him around from place to place. If anybody is laying off the nurses, the MRI technicians, the front-line health care workers, it's his health minister who is laying those people off in the province of Ontario today.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan.

Please continue.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thank you, Speaker.

The Premier also knows that today is the one-month anniversary of Ontario becoming a have-not province. For the first time in the history of Confederation, Ontario is on the welfare rolls of Canada. So not only didn't you bring forward any kind of restraint in spending, you have yet to produce any plan to grow us out of have-not status.

Premier, when it comes to finding a way to grow us, you become a have-not Premier. Where is your plan to create jobs in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I guess a few things on this score. Number one, I would really love to get the support of my honourable colleague opposite on this matter. He's adopting a line that comes out of Ottawa and it's something that transcends partisan colour in Ottawa, I must say, as well. The truth is that this year Ontario taxpayers have sent \$23.5 billion to Ottawa for distribution to the rest of the country. The truth is, this year there are only three net contributors to the federation: Ontario, Alberta and BC, and if you add the other two together, we supply 40% more than the other two combined.

With respect to our public service costs, I want to tell you once again that we have reduced the overall cost of government administration from 15% in 2003-04 to 12% in 2007-08. Finally, we have the lowest number of public service employees per capita of any province in Canada.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The question is to the Premier. Why does this government still not have an IBI/ABA pilot program in place being run with regional agencies and school boards almost two years after being told that's exactly what's needed?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you, Mr. Premier. I think the member opposite knows full well that I have been working very closely with the Minister of Children and Youth Services; that, in fact, we have seven pilots right now in the province where the IBI providers are working with the education system to provide a continuum of service. That's what parents have asked us for. Parents have said, "I want to know when my child is ready to move into the school system and then I want to know that the supports are there for my child." Those pilots are in place. We are working on doubling the pilots for next year and we're learning from what we've done already. In fact, the results look to be very, very promising for kids being able to have that continuum of service that they're looking for.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This minister knows very well that a couple of hours of professional activity for teaching assistants is not enough to help children with ABA or IBI in the classroom. The reality is, parents are very well aware that their children are not getting the supports they need. They're not getting the assistance they need to have an equal opportunity at education as every other child in this province. The minister knows also that tomorrow,

the Supreme Court of Canada is going to be ruling on this government's obligation to provide IBI/ABA to all Ontario children with autism.

My question is this: When is this government going to get serious about its obligation and stop forcing parents to sell their homes to be able to afford the services that are needed for their children, for IBI and ABA?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What this minister knows is that moral indignation is not going to solve this problem. What's going to solve this problem is investing in training. We have spent \$15 million on training staff to understand what the ABA approach is and how it works. We are creating multidisciplinary teams, because one of the things that parents have said is that all of the service providers need to be wrapped around an individual child, because when one service provider isn't talking to the school system and isn't talking to another service provider, the child doesn't get the integrated service that he or she needs.

What the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and I are doing: We are coordinating services, we are making sure that those community services dovetail with what's being offered in the schools, and the training for our educators is ongoing. It's not a one-time fix. It's something that is ongoing, and we will continue to work to meet those kids' needs.

LAKE SIMCOE

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a question to the Minister of the Environment. Monday was a historic day for the residents of the Lake Simcoe watershed. As you know, that precious lake is very fragile. After 200 years with so many people living around it, so much recreational activity, all the boats, all the lack of attention, finally the government has done something to protect this precious, gorgeous Lake Simcoe. As Annabel Slaight, the co-founder of the Ladies of the Lake, has said, we are getting to the protection of this great lake and beautiful watershed just in the nick of time—just in time, Minister.

The question I have for you is, can you outline to this House and to all the people who care so much about Lake Simcoe what kind of co-operative actions you will continue to undertake in the future to make sure everybody plays a role in protective actions for this wonderful—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. John Gerretsen: First of all, I'd like to thank the member for his ongoing support, because he has been concerned about the lake, as has the member from Barrie, as have been members from all sides of the House. I'd first of all like to thank all of the members of the House who actually passed this bill unanimously, which I think is very significant. The bill is all about restoring the health and the ecosystem of the lake; it's all about reducing the phosphorus levels in the lake; it's about re-introducing the cold water fishery that's in the lake; it's about dealing with the climate change issues, and also dealing with the invasive species that are now attacking

the lake. It calls for a plan, and we're currently developing the plan. There has been an awful lot of consultation with an awful lot of people about this. I want to make sure that the health of the lake is absolutely protected. That's what it's all about.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Mike Colle: Minister, as we know, the passage of this bill is a landmark event, but it's only the first step. There has to be a follow-up now, and what will be in the follow-up to protect—

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Colle: They laugh at this lake, but it's not only the lake; it's all the watershed around it. The land is also important because, if you pollute the land around the lake, you pollute the lake. The NDP doesn't understand that. Explain that to them, Mr. Minister.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Yes. It's enabling legislation that will now allow us to develop a plan to protect the lake and the watershed, which includes the 35 different rivers and streams that flow into the lake as well.

We're in the process of doing that, but it couldn't have been done without the tremendous help over the last 20 years or so by LSEMS, the Lake Simcoe environmental management strategy, by the Ladies of the Lake, by Campaign Lake Simcoe, by the stakeholder groups that we had involved. It's all going to be based on science. We certainly thank the science community for making sure we're on the right track, and the stakeholder advisory committee as well.

This plan that we're developing is one that we can all be proud of. Years from now, children and their children will thank us for protecting this lake, which, without the action this government has taken, simply wouldn't have happened.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The time for question period has expired. This House stands recessed until 3 o'clock this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1134 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Brad Duguid: It's my honour to introduce to the Legislature Sam George, his wife, Veronica, and his friends and family, Murray Klippenstein, Deputy Grand Chief Glen Hare, Bob Goulais, Tammy Jackson, Jeffrey Jackson, Irvin George, Basil Alexander, Laurie Hardwick, Nathan Wright, Elizabeth Smith-VanBeek, Alex Farquhar, and Katherine Hensel. They're here to honour Sam and his good work, and I thank them for coming and joining us today.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: In the gallery are my constituents Brooke and Jade Bordman, six-year-old twins from the riding of Cambridge who suffer from type 1 diabetes, along with their parents, Terry and Beata Borden, and their older sister Fallon.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm very pleased to introduce, in the visitors' gallery, two of my constituents, Jim and Sue Dacosta, who have been big supporters of Bethesda

House, a women's shelter in my riding of Durham. I'm pleased to welcome them here today.

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Today, we recognized a number of staff from the Ontario Legislature and I want to take this opportunity to recognize them formally in the chamber.

From the Office of the Clerk: Eileen Rosemond, 35 years of service; Maureen Henry, 25 years; Robert Cowieson, 25 years; Deborah Ceasar, 25 years.

From the legislative services division: Karyn Leonard, 35 years; Kathryn MacGregor, 30 years; Janet McKenzie, 30 years; Rocco Rampino, 30 years; Louise Tomlinson, 30 years; Ambrose Chiu, 30 years; James Floros, 30 years; Dimitrios Jim Petselis, 25 years; Estelita Chan, 25 years; Susan Bercasio, 25 years.

From the Sergeant-at-Arms division: John Fraser, 35 years; Humphrey Lau, 30 years; Joe Alaksa, 25 years.

From the legislative library: Janice Cole Mabee, 25 years; Elaine Campbell, 25 years; Rosie Salvo, 25 years; Philip Kaye, 25 years.

Congratulations to all of these individuals. We thank them for their work and their support of all of us here at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

LONG POINT

Mr. Toby Barrett: I rise today to talk about what could be one of the world's seven wonders of nature, Long Point. It's a sandspit in the rich riding of Haldimand-Norfolk.

Long Point juts over 30 miles into Lake Erie and has already claimed the fame of being Canada's longest sandspit and may well be the world's longest sandspit in fresh water.

Long Point can be seen from outer space and is usually a fixture on television weather maps. Further, Long Point is designated as a world biosphere area by UNESCO.

It's a great place to go in the summer. It has some of the world's longest white, sandy beaches and has become quite a destination for migratory bird lovers. It's also the national headquarters for Bird Studies Canada.

Long Point is truly unique. We feel we're blessed that it's in our area. If you haven't been down to Long Point, I invite you down, and you can see for yourself that it's most deserving of being one of the seven wonders of nature. I ask people to visit www.new7wonders.com before December 31 and cast your vote if you agree. I know that people down in Long Point country would appreciate the support.

COOPER MARSH CONSERVATION AREA

Mr. Jim Brownell: Located on the shores of Lake St. Francis in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, Cooper Marsh Conservation Area is part of the larger Charlottenburgh Marsh. This is one of the most significant wetlands in all of Ontario. Serving as both a wildlife preserve and an education centre under the mandate of the Raisin Region Conservation Authority, Cooper Marsh provides opportunities for visitors, both young and old, to learn more about the great varieties of animals and birds that call the marsh their home.

Walking along the eight kilometres of boardwalks and trails, visitors have an opportunity to see some of the more than 130 species of birds, including the great white egret, the black-crowned heron and the osprey.

Cooper Marsh itself benefits from the support of the Cooper Marsh Conservators, a group of local citizens with a passion for protecting wildlife and wetlands and ensuring this great general public area is open for the public to be informed of the significance of a wildlife refuge. With the support of the St. Lawrence River Institute, the conservators have helped to raise awareness about the flora and fauna of our environment and the responsibilities we have, in terms of protecting the environment.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Cooper Marsh Conservators, the St. Lawrence River Institute and the Raisin Region Conservation Authority for the good work they do all year round to maintain and protect Cooper Marsh. I would also like to encourage all members to come to the riding, visit Cooper Marsh and experience this wonderful wildlife refuge for themselves.

SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise in the House today to recognize the Ontario Principals' Council for their hard work, their dedication, and their commitment to our students and to educators across this province.

Through their efforts, Ontario will continue to graduate the best and the brightest as they prepare our students to enter a competitive global marketplace. Principals set the tone of our schools' learning environment. They create order out of chaos and wear many hats during the course of the day, too many to mention in the time I've been allotted.

I've had the pleasure of meeting with the OPC representatives today, and their interest in overcoming the obstacles to succession planning for principals and teachers struck a real chord with me. We, as legislators, as parents and grandparents, must ensure that our educators are in a strong position that best meets their needs as well as the interests of the schools they work in and the students they serve.

Succession planning is the key to any dynamic organization and our school system is no different. I credit the OPC for raising this issue and I look forward to any opportunity in the near future to assist them with this

objective. Thank you to them for the great work that they do and the legacy that they are leaving us all.

1510

UKRAINIAN GENOCIDE

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I rise in the House today to honour Ukrainian Holodomor survivors. On November 30, people from across London remembered the Ukrainian genocide, better known as the Holodomor, which translates from Ukrainian into "murder by hunger."

My riding of London-Fanshawe is blessed to have survivors of the Holodomor as citizens. They were the guests of honour at the commemoration held at the London Ukrainian Centre where bread and prayers were offered. Along with representatives from the city, the province and the federal government, we paid our respects to the survivors and those who have moved on to a better place. It was a reminder of the need to be conscious and grateful for being in a peaceful country.

In May of this year, our nation recognized the horrific tragedy as genocide by forced starvation, which killed between seven million and 10 million people, with one third of them being children. Bread was taken from the mouths of the dying and the population was stripped of every possession.

I would like to use this opportunity to encourage my colleagues and fellow Ontarians to read about the Holodomor and participate in any future commemorations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to do it.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Ted Arnott: Like all MPPs, my office has received an extraordinary number of e-mails from constituents who want this government to put the brakes on Bill 126. It's clear the McGuinty government failed to anticipate such a strong public backlash from both young drivers and their parents.

Today, more than 142,000 people are part of the Facebook group to protest this legislation. Many of my constituents share their views, including a 19-year-old who has a standing agreement with his friends to pick them up any time, day or night, if they've been drinking. Also concerned is Rein Kao, a father of three who notes that in rural and semi-rural parts of Ontario, this legislation creates far more difficulties than it resolves.

Of course, there is always room for improvement, especially in preventing drinking and driving, but instead of ramming through this hefty 57-page bill that has already ignited such strong opposition, the government must follow the lead of the PC caucus. The government must hold full public hearings on Bill 126.

John Tory has already started the dialogue. Tonight, he will be holding an online discussion about this legislation at ontariopc.com, and I encourage everyone, including the Minister of Health, to log on and participate.

We need a bill that is sensible and enforceable while taking into account the realities of life, especially in rural and small-town Ontario. Let's take the time to get this right.

UNIVERSITY LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I was just outside, where there is a demonstration of about 300 people who are sessional contract workers at York University. They are worried, because they say, and I say, we are witnessing across Ontario a move away from full-time secure jobs to part-time, sessional, contract teaching jobs. This, they argue, as I do, is a very disturbing trend.

Members of CUPE do more than half of the classroom teaching at York University—more than half—yet their contracts represent just 7.5% of the university's \$848-million annual budget. This has been appropriately called the Wal-Martification of universities.

Contract sessional workers have no job security. They live on subsistence wages, and many have to apply for their jobs every four months. While university presidents, vice-presidents and administrators earn anywhere from \$200,000 to \$500,000, excluding their car allowance, house allowance and million-dollar payouts, those who do the bulk of the teaching at York University live on subsistence wages. It's wrong, and it is outrageous.

We want the students to go back to classes that are taught by workers who are treated fairly and compensated adequately. Forcing them to go back to work is not the answer. Fair compensation—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Eglington-Lawrence.

SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Mr. Mike Colle: It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House to talk about how far the province of Ontario has come in the area of publicly funded education. Today is Principals' Day here at the Legislature, and we are celebrating their hard work and dedication to student achievement across the province. The McGuinty government commends the work principals and vice-principals do on a daily basis to help students reach their full potential. They play a critical role in fulfilling educational priorities, increasing student achievement and restoring public confidence in our schools.

To recognize and strengthen the role of principals in our schools, the McGuinty Liberals recently launched the Ontario leadership strategy. This is a comprehensive plan designed to attract skilled and passionate school leaders. Through collaboration with various partners and the Ministry of Education, the strategy provides new principals and vice-principals with the supports they need to develop as leaders so they can continue to support student achievement. The strategy signifies the McGuinty government's commitment to our education system and understanding that principals are critical to students' academic achievement.

I encourage all members of this House and all Ontarians to recognize the efforts of Ontario's principals and vice-principals, not just today but throughout the year. There is a saying among all of us who have had children

and grandchildren in the school system and in our great neighbourhood schools: If you've got a good principal, you've got a great school. That is the combination we need to make education go forward.

CHILD ABUSE

Mr. Jeff Leal: Boost Child Abuse Prevention and Intervention opened an office in my riding of Peterborough on Monday, December 1, 2008. Boost is a community-based agency that works very hard to prevent abuse and violence in the lives of children, young people and their families. With the opening of this office, the central region has a child victim/witness support program with offices in Peterborough and Barrie. This program prepares and supports a child going through the criminal justice system.

Testifying in court is an intimidating experience for most adults. Imagine how frightening it would be for a child. Boost prepares these children for this life experience in a way that reduces further trauma. They also work with the community, providing education to better understand the role a child plays in the justice system, and advocate for children, youth and their families or support persons.

As we know, October was Child Abuse Prevention Month. This year marks the fourth year of Boost's Go Purple for Prevention campaign to raise awareness of abuse and violence in the lives of children. Inspired by Boost, close to 70 cities and towns across this great province have proclaimed October as Child Abuse Prevention Month. I'm pleased to stand here today and congratulate Boost for the excellent work they do, and welcome them to my riding of Peterborough.

TED ROGERS

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Yesterday, December 2, 2008, marked the passing of Ted Rogers, one of Canada's most prominent figures and media icons.

I had the opportunity to meet him on several occasions while working at OMNI television, one of the many TV stations, radio stations and print media that he owned across the country.

I remember him as a towering, cordial man, very passionate about his work. The numerous media articles that were published yesterday used many adjectives to describe Ted Rogers: a great businessman, master of the communication universe in Canada, a philanthropist, a visionary, fearless, risk-embracing in business.

Let me share with this House how I witnessed, in my own way, his pioneering vision and his risk-taking. In 1986, he took over a modest multilingual TV station founded by another Canadian ethnic media pioneer, Dan Iannuzzi. It was a time when few believed in the potential and the growth of ethno-cultural media in Canada. Ted Rogers, however, took the risk willingly. Under his leadership and with his investments, the station grew and now encompasses four different TV stations.

I was able to work in broadcasting in my native language for over two decades while living in Canada, thanks to Ted Rogers's intuition and long-term vision.

One of his favourite sayings was, "The best is yet to come," a phrase which encapsulates his philosophy of life. We could all benefit from adopting this point of view.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Michael Prue: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum: Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill Pr19, An Act to revive Able Insurance Brokers Ltd.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT (PUPILS WITH DIABETES), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION (ÉLÈVES DIABÉTIQUES)

Mr. Martiniuk moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 137, An Act to amend the Education Act to allow pupils with diabetes in schools to receive certain monitoring and treatment/ Projet de loi 137, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation pour permettre aux élèves diabétiques dans les écoles de recevoir un suivi et un traitement.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I dedicate this bill to the Bordman family and all the dedicated families meeting the challenge of type 1 diabetes across our great province. My bill will, for the first time, require that public school staff assist young schoolchildren who suffer from type 1 diabetes with ongoing monitoring of their blood sugar levels and necessary medication.

Just as Sabrina's Law requires treatment of children who suffer from life-threatening allergies, my bill

protects the health of children who suffer from the effects of diabetes and assists them in emergency situations. The intent of this bill is also to protect school staff by prohibiting actions against them arising out of any assistance they would provide.

I ask all of you in the Legislature to support my private member's bill and assist young schoolchildren who suffer from diabetes.

JOSEPH AND WOLF LEBOVIC JEWISH COMMUNITY CAMPUS ACT, 2008

Mr. Sorbara moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr20, An Act respecting the Joseph and Wolf Lebovic Jewish Community Campus.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

1520

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

MAYNARD SAM GEORGE

Hon. Brad Duguid: It's my pleasure and honour to rise in the House today to honour Maynard Sam George, a true hero and advocate who has dedicated his life to seeking a better future for First Nations, Inuit and Metis people in Ontario. Sam is the brother of Dudley George, who tragically lost his life in Ipperwash Provincial Park in September 1995.

Mr. Speaker, I'm standing here with you today in this House as Minister of Aboriginal Affairs only because of Sam George. If it had not been for Sam's efforts to pursue justice for his brother and community, there would not have been an inquiry. This inquiry, headed by Justice Linden, led to the report of the Ipperwash Inquiry, which recommended the creation of a stand-alone Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs.

I must pay tribute at this time to a very close friend and ally of Sam, the Honourable Gerry Phillips, who worked tirelessly with Sam in pursuit of justice and reconciliation. I'd also like to pay tribute to the Honourable Michael Bryant, my predecessor, whose work on both the setting up of this inquiry and the implementation of the recommendations was really highly regarded.

Sam continues to promote healing between communities and to support the implementation of the recommendations of the report. He's not only been fearless in his search for the truth, but also more recently, in dealing with some very significant health issues. We are all confident that Sam George's grace and courage will serve him well during this challenging time.

The report, made possible through the efforts of Sam George, sets out the road map for the government and

First Nations working together to prevent such a tragedy from ever happening again. We've taken the report's recommendations to heart. We learned that after generations of setbacks, we can, must and will do better. We're working with aboriginal leadership to identify priorities for implementation. And I'm happy to tell you that we are making progress together on implementing those recommendations.

Sam asked from the beginning that Ipperwash Provincial Park be returned to the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation, and last December our government committed to transferring the park. We're working in partnership toward that goal.

We're committed to building a new and stronger relationship with the First Nations and Metis communities, based on trust and respect, as we work together on joint initiatives. The new relationship fund, another of Justice Linden's recommendations, which we announced on May 15, 2008, is designed to promote economic development opportunities in aboriginal communities and build the capacity to consult with government and the private sector on resource development and other important initiatives.

Sam George has built an honourable and lasting legacy. In recognition of his efforts, Sam George was invested into the Order of Ontario in November, the province's highest honour. This tribute will serve as a permanent reminder to the people of Ontario of what Sam has achieved.

I had the privilege to further honour Sam by dedicating my ministry's resource library to his name. This Sam George Resource Library will serve as another permanent reminder of Sam's tireless efforts to increase public awareness of aboriginal issues in this province.

There are few heroes in our society. Heroes only come along a few times in a generation. I can say unequivocally that Sam George is a true modern-day hero. His courage, grace and perseverance in the face of tragedy stand as a model to not only First Nation, Metis and Inuit, but all Ontarians.

Sam, your brother Dudley would be so proud of you today. Your efforts have brought change that can only be described as historic when it comes to improving the relationship between the province of Ontario and First Nation, Metis and Inuit communities.

Sam, on behalf of the government of Ontario, my colleagues throughout this Legislature and the people of Ontario, we honour you today. We honour your wife, Veronica, and your family. I say on behalf of the people of Ontario, meegwetch.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I rise today in the House to honour the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Around the world, people are celebrating

this day and promoting the theme of dignity and justice for everyone.

Cette année est tout à fait spéciale. En mai dernier, les Nations Unies ont introduit la Convention relative aux droits des personnes handicapées. Cette convention prend position en faveur de la protection des droits des personnes handicapées dans le monde entier, y compris au Canada.

Pour les personnes handicapées, l'accessibilité est la clé de l'égalité des droits et la voie qui mène à l'inclusion.

Here in Ontario, we have come a long way in the journey to help improve accessibility and increase equality for people with disabilities. At the turn of the last century, people with disabilities, especially those with developmental disabilities, were treated more as patients rather than citizens, as burdens instead of people. People with disabilities did not have the same access to schools, to employment or to other opportunities. We have overcome many obstacles that prevented people from disabilities from having equal opportunities.

Grâce à la réorganisation des services aux personnes ayant une déficience intellectuelle, les personnes handicapées vivent de façon plus autonome, disposent d'un plus grand choix et ont plus de potentiel que jamais. Notre province est aujourd'hui un endroit plus inclusif pour les personnes de toutes compétences, et l'Ontario en bénéficie.

Cependant, tous les obstacles à la pleine participation des personnes handicapées à la vie de la province n'ont pas été éliminés.

That's why, through the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, we are striving to break down these barriers and reshape our province for people with disabilities. Just this week, we took another step forward to help Ontarians with disabilities. People receiving social assistance can now take advantage of registered disability savings plans. We are making sure that people can put money in an RSP without it affecting their eligibility for disability support. This will make it easier for families to save for their children with disabilities.

Our vision is a province where, by 2025, everyone has equal opportunities and an equal place in society. This vision is shared globally.

Alors que la population du monde entier se mobilise pour commémorer cette journée spéciale, j'encourage tous les députés de l'Assemblée à réfléchir à la façon dont nous pourrions rendre notre province plus universelle pour les personnes handicapées.

Assurons-nous que l'esprit qui anime cette Journée internationale des personnes handicapées caractérise toutes les journées de l'année.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On a point of order: The opposition recognizes these are two very important statements, and we would ask equal time for the opposition bench that the government got for their statements.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

That unanimous consent that was granted would allocate approximately nine minutes to each of the opposition parties for their responses.

1530

MAYNARD SAM GEORGE

Mr. Norm Miller: On behalf of our caucus, I'm pleased to congratulate Mr. Sam George on receiving the Order of Ontario. Sam George's pursuit of an inquiry on behalf of his brother Dudley George showed dogged determination. Through Mr. George's efforts, the Ontario government returned control of Ipperwash Provincial Park to the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation. He is proof that one person can make a difference. He has also highlighted the need for the public to understand treaty issues in order to bring peace and put an end to future blockades.

His message is important. Only through understanding and mutual respect can we resolve differences and build a better understanding of one another and the needs of our respective communities. Failure to resolve disputes peacefully is a failure for all of us. Mr. George is proof that we can build our future on a foundation of respect and understanding. I would like to thank him for his advocacy for all First Peoples, for his family and, indeed, for all Ontarians, and I wish him and his family the very best in the future. Meegwetch.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to speak on behalf of the Progressive Conservative Party to commemorate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Today we also recognize the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. "Dignity and justice for all of us" is the theme of this year's International Day of Persons with Disabilities. All members of the Legislature should acknowledge that much has been achieved over the last number of years by the broader public sector and businesses, but there is still much more we can achieve to make Ontario accessible to all Ontarians who fully wish to participate in their communities.

The minister is quick to take credit for the hard work being done in communities by municipalities, hospitals, schools and businesses but, before she pats herself on the back too quickly, we all know that actions speak louder than words. Dignity and justice for all of us means that we should truly support persons with disabilities so that they can live full and rewarding lives in communities across our province.

I question the minister's commitment to dignity and justice for all. Over the past year, we have learned that only 10% of those who applied for Passport funding—

Interjections.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I afforded them the dignity. Over the past year, we have learned that only 10% of those who have applied for Passport funding received support from this ministry. The rest remain on waiting lists, a concept that the Liberal government actually entrenched in legislation with Bill 77. Is waiting with no support allowing dignity? Is that justice?

At age 21, many disabled young adults who have been thriving in the education system do not have access to programs or support from your government. Earlier this year, the public gallery was filled with families that had been turned down for Passport funding. They clearly told us that their children, who previously had been enjoying co-op placements and learning in the education system, are now at home sitting on the couch. Should we accept a generation of school leavers languishing in our homes? Is that dignity? Is that justice for all?

There are real consequences for these young adults and their families. I recently heard from a family in Peterborough whose daughter has turned 21. The family has been unable to receive Passport funding and has used up all their special services-at-home funding. Now that mother is being forced to quit her job so that she can stay at home to care for her daughter. I ask you, how does your reluctance to properly fund the Passport program lead to dignity and justice for all? Contrast your inaction with the positive changes the federal Conservative government has been making. They are leading the way.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. The honourable members of the opposition were respectful when the two statements were made. I would ask that the honourable members respect that as well.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: The federal government is leading the way by establishing the registered disability savings plan. The—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That took all of about five seconds. Please have some respect for the Chair, the honourable member from Etobicoke North.

Please continue.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: The RDSP will allow families to set aside resources for those who do not have the financial means. The federal government will provide disability savings bonds to support disability, to support disabled persons who set up RDSPs. This is such an important change for families. It will allow individuals with disabilities to live with dignity in our community. Yet your government did not embrace this change. You dragged your feet on this issue for almost a year and only this week agreed to allow Ontario residents to tap into the RDSP program—after hundreds of families had lobbied you to support my private member's bill.

Minister, actions do speak louder than words. I think it's time for your government to support the Passport funding program. Individuals and families need our support so that there is truly justice and dignity for all.

MAYNARD SAM GEORGE

Mr. Gilles Bisson: September 6, 1995 is a date that will be etched in the memories of the consciousness of not only Ontario, but all aboriginal people in the province of Ontario. It's a sad date, a date where people gathered lawfully in order to be able to protect what is rightfully theirs, which is the memories of their ancestors and a sacred burial site within Ipperwash.

They were doing what all of us would have done. Can you imagine, in our society, if your grandmother, your grandfather, your father, your brother, or sister had been buried, and all of a sudden somebody wanted to dig up the remains of those people? What would we do? Would we not do the same? Would we not gather to try to protect those people who came before us, who gave us our very existence? Would you not try to protect the memory of your forefathers? Dudley and the rest who were there from the Ipperwash First Nation, and others, were doing what we all would have done. Unfortunately, something went very wrong. This place today is not where to lay blame, but to remember where we come from and where we need to go.

Clearly, what was happening in that community is what we would have all done in the same circumstance. Unfortunately, an incident happened where Dudley died. And since that day, Sam and his community have gathered and tried to get justice for his community, to get justice for the aboriginal people of this province—and I would argue for all citizens of this province—because an injustice done to one, my friends, is an injustice done to all. What Sam understood, and his community understood—and others who have supported him along the way, such as Gerry Phillips, Bud Wildman, Howard Hampton, the labour movement and the communities and others who laid before him in order to try to get justice—is that when one member of our society is disregarded when it comes to their lawful right, and the decency of being able to be treated as citizens, it's an injustice to all of us.

Sam, I say to you and I say to your community, and to those that came with you: This has been a very long journey. It has not been without difficulty. You've had situations, quite frankly, where it's been pretty hurtful; where people in our community of Ontario said hurtful things to you and your family and to your people. I say, on behalf of all Ontarians, that we're sorry, that should have never happened, and that we as citizens of this province need to understand that we are all citizens of this province and we must all, together, strive to make a better Ontario for all.

Sam, you've been given this order, and I know you are not one who likes to be seen as somebody who is getting an Order of Ontario. That is not why you did this. This was all about getting justice, not only to your brother, but to all people in this province, and specifically aboriginal people for what is rightfully yours—and that is to be able to protect the cherished memory of your forefathers. There's much that we need to do.

Still, within Ontario many injustices happen both within and outside the aboriginal community. Our job as legislators is to combat that and is to, at every opportunity, make right the wrongs that face us in our society. It is wrong that in aboriginal communities across this province we are seeing dropout rates of 70% of children by the time of grade 8. It is wrong when we see within First Nations across this province, and specifically in my own communities, in my own riding, along with Howard

and Mr. Gravelle and others, where 25 people are living in a home. It is wrong when we see infrastructure that fails the children and people get sick, such as we've seen in the communities of Kashechewan and many others.

1540

This is not about laying blame. This is not the fault of one party; this is the fault of our society. We as a society need to recognize that we don't have a lot to be proud of in the way that we've treated our First Nations brothers and sisters. We really need to be saying at this time and in this place today that we engage ourselves in a process that will be more than just an Order of Ontario, but will be about bringing justice to the people of the First Nations across this province. It's about, yes, settling land claims that have been lingering for far too long; yes, about stopping to point fingers at each other—white communities, aboriginal communities, federal government, provincial governments—saying, "It's your fault," "No, it's your fault," "No, it's your fault," and instead saying, "It is our responsibility to find solutions to these problems."

I say to all of us here today, yes, let's celebrate that Sam was given the Order of Ontario, but let us not forget that there are many other injustices in our society, and we, as citizens of the province, owe it to all to overcome those injustices.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm pleased to rise today to recognize December 3, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, la Journée Internationale des personnes handicapées. This is an important day to promote an understanding of disability issues and mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. It is a day to recognize the valuable contributions and participation in society of persons with disabilities. It is also a day to reflect on the barriers that are still persistent in the achievement of full equity and human rights for people with disabilities.

The theme of this year, as has been mentioned, is dignity and justice for all—a theme that New Democrats echo and wish to see implemented for persons with disabilities everywhere, but especially here in Ontario. However, there is no dignity or justice in the unfortunate truth that individuals with disabilities in this province are being resigned to a life sentence of poverty, a sentence that government inaction is forcing them to fulfill.

Talking about developmental disabilities, according to the Provincial Network on Developmental Services, approximately 13,400 people with a developmental disability are waiting for residential services, day support and other supports and services. Many families are waiting five years or more for residential services. This situation is tied up with many other obstacles people with disabilities face just in trying to make ends meet.

Not only are there waiting lists, income supports for people with disabilities are woefully inadequate. A single person on ODSP receives a maximum of \$999 a month. That's a little bit shy of \$12,000 a year. That must cover all of their expenses, including shelter, food, clothing, transportation and medical appointments. Currently, ODSP rates fall far below the poverty line. For a single person living in an urban setting in Ontario, that line is at \$19,000 a year—a \$7,000 gap. Ontarians with disabilities need a substantial increase in the income support provided through ODSP to have justice and dignity.

Attendant services wait times for individuals with physical disabilities are up to four years. This is an injustice to those who can and want to participate meaningfully in their communities, but simply cannot because they cannot get the attendant supports they need. Where is the action from the government on that front?

During the poverty consultations, submissions were overwhelmingly dominated with concern about the ODSP rate and the social, physical and particularly economic barriers which exist in breaking the cycle of poverty for people with disabilities.

We look forward to a firm commitment in the poverty plan set to be unveiled by this government tomorrow, I take it, which prioritizes access for people with disabilities so that they can truly live with justice and dignity in this province, with the support and the resources they need. On this international day of recognition, let us ensure that our attention to this issue is not simply on this day, but that every day we are working proactively to ensure that disability is not a poverty sentence in this province. Lorsque les personnes vivant avec un handicap n'auront plus à vivre dans la pauvreté, nous aurons la dignité et la justice pour tous.

NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE AND ACTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Hon. Monique M. Smith: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent that up to five minutes be allotted to each party to speak on the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: On December 6, Ontario will join all other provinces in Canada in recognizing the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. We will pause to remember the tragic act that was committed against 14 young women.

On December 6, 1989, a gunman entered a classroom at l'École Polytechnique de Montréal and killed 14 female engineering students, shouting, "I hate feminists." He then turned the gun on himself, ending his own life. These young women died simply because they were women. They were bright young women with hopes and with dreams, hopes and dreams never to be realized because of a hateful act of violence. People across the

country were horrified that this terrible act happened right here in Canada.

To honour the memory of these women, the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women was established in 1991. It is a day to ensure that we collectively take action to put a stop to violence against women. We are all called to do our part.

Today in our gallery, we have leaders of organizations who work tirelessly every day to effect change in their communities: leaders of provincial networks, members of my domestic violence advisory council and other passionate activists. Please join me in acknowledging them and thanking them for the work they do every day.

Applause.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Our government is reliant on their advocacy and advice. In this spirit of partnership, we have moved forward with our government's domestic violence action plan since 2004. Every day we are working for change. We now have more help for women. Just last week, my colleague the Attorney General brought forward proposed changes to family law to enhance protection for women and children fleeing domestic violence. This is in addition to many changes that have been enacted in recent years to improve the justice sector's response to violence against women.

While there certainly are positive changes, as a society we have not achieved the ultimate goal: fundamental equality for women. Despite the many glass ceilings we have broken and the barriers we have eliminated, women remain vulnerable to violence. More than half of Canadian women report that they have experienced at least one incidence of violence since they were 16 years old. These numbers tell a terrible tale, but we continue with resolve. We continue in partnership with the leaders present with us today and community groups throughout the province.

Yesterday, the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses released its report called *Survivor Voices: Welcoming Women to Make Change*. We must listen to the women who have experienced violence on how we can improve support services. We all have a role to play in putting a stop to violence. We can all help with this change by wearing a rose button or a white ribbon to show our support.

Ending violence against women starts in our communities. We urge all Ontarians to join us in our efforts and the efforts of our guests in the House today.

We mourn together for what could have been for the 14 young women killed in 1989. We grieve for their families and the women who are victims of violence, especially those who have gone unnoticed and unreported. Let's take a moment of silence for these women and then end the silence with a commitment to work for change together.

1550

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus to recognize the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. Declared by Parliament in 1991,

December 6 was selected because it was the day on which the terrible events occurred at the Université de Montréal's École Polytechnique.

Since the beginning of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec in the 1960s, women have been making great advances in non-traditional education and professional aspirations. In the 1970s and 1980s, many young women were attracted to l'École Polytechnique, the school of engineering at the University of Montreal. On December 6, 19 years ago, 14 young, intelligent women full of life and promise for the future were hunted down, separated from their male colleagues and murdered just because they were women. They were murdered by a young man who said he was fighting feminism and who blamed feminists for ruining his life. This is a day that will be remembered forever across Canada, a day that a man, in his pure hatred of women, stole the lives of 14 innocent women and, worse, felt justified in doing so—a man who felt that a lower class of person took away from him something that he deserved.

It's important to take this time today for serious reflection to remember the young women who died and the families they left behind. So many hopes and dreams were crushed on that terrible day. We owe it to the memory of those young women and to the families who have had to struggle on without them to continue to work diligently to put an end to violence against women.

This is a day to consider what we can do as a province, as a society, as communities and as people to discourage violence against women. Many communities have worked long and hard with organizations to advance anti-violence programs.

I would like to mention some of the work that has been done by my community over the past month to raise awareness of violence against women.

In a series of events, Durham College and the University of Ontario Institute of Technology have shone the spotlight on the reduction of violence against women. They held a Jeans for Justice campaign where students wrote messages on pairs of jeans to confirm their commitment to the reduction of and intolerance toward violence against women. This was held to condemn a 1999 court ruling in Italy, wherein a court decided that a rapist could not have removed his victim's jeans without her assistance, as they were so tight she must therefore have been a willing participant in her own assault. Durham College also hosted a Jackson Katz speaking engagement in November. Mr. Katz is an internationally renowned advocate for the prevention of violence against women. Finally, a fraternity in the school organized Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, a day when male students walked the campus in women's shoes to raise awareness of the crime of violence against women.

In addition, to raise awareness of resources for abused women, Durham Region Transit donated free advertising on their buses for the Denise House, a shelter that abused women in my riding can access.

This is a day to remember the tragedy now known as the Montreal massacre, a day to remember all women

who senselessly died because someone thought that their lives or rights weren't important, and finally, a day to reconfirm our commitment as public servants to defeating violence against women, both by our own efforts and by supporting the many individual groups and individuals and organizations in our communities that are doing important work on ending violence against women.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: As the women's critic for the New Democratic Party, it's an honour to rise on behalf of the victims of Marc Lépine and on behalf of women everywhere.

When Marc Lépine broke into l'École Polytechnique and started firing at women, as you heard the minister say, he was not just firing at them, he was firing at all feminists.

I want to say that I proudly stand as a feminist here in this House, and I hope that every member of this House considers themselves a feminist.

What is a feminist? What was he trying to murder?

Feminism is what gave us the vote.

Feminism is what construed women as persons and not as property. I'm the first woman born into my family as a person. My mother was born as property. My grandmother was born as property. So we are persons today because of feminism.

What else did feminism do?

Feminism is that incredible struggle that gained us equal opportunity in universities. Did you know that in the 1960s, there was a quota system for women in engineering and there was a quota system for women in medicine, considered male fields? That's what feminism did. When I was a kid, we as feminists struggled against male and female help wanted ads in the newspapers—anyone over a certain age remembers "Help Wanted, Male" and "Help Wanted, Female." That's what feminism has gained for us.

What does feminism want from us now? Here's what feminists want now. They don't want just commemoration. They want—we want—action. What do we want? Well, let's go through the list.

First and foremost, we need action on the poverty file, because poverty is a women's issue. Unless women have economic independence, they cannot flee domestic violence. What does that mean? That means a minimum wage that's a living wage, at least \$10.25 an hour.

What else does it mean? It means women need housing: transition housing—beds to escape to—and affordable housing, instead of 130,000 families waiting for affordable housing in Ontario. That is what feminists call for now.

Feminists call for daycare. We don't have daycare in this province. Only one in 10 families has daycare. We need a daycare right here at Queen's Park. We don't have one. That's what feminists want.

Feminists want the Miss G Project to get what they have been asking for ever since they were formed, and that's women's studies in the high schools, because if we don't know our herstory, then we won't learn how to take

feminism forward. So we need women's studies in the high school.

Today I was speaking to the OFL, and guess what? The Ontario Federation of Labour is saying that Ontario working women should not have to choose between their safety or their jobs. Right now, women have to choose between their safety and their job. We need to have time off for women who are escaping abuse, because we know—Lori Dupont showed us—that the abusers will follow them right into their workplaces and attack them there. We need to have provisions made in the workplace for women fleeing abuse. This means health and safety regulations; it means changes in employment standards.

As a proud feminist, I stand amid, I hope, a collection of feminists saying, "Please, enough commemoration; it's time for action." If not for us, then certainly for our daughters and certainly for their daughters, so that they proudly stand up, the same women that Marc Lépine tried to eradicate on that day at L'École polytechnique, and say, "I am a feminist. We are feminists. We're proud to be feminists. Here is what feminists have done, here is what feminists demand and here is what feminists will do."

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask all members and our guests in the Legislature today to join us in a moment of silence in remembrance of the tragic events at the University of Montreal on December 6, 1989, and to reconfirm our commitment to end violence against women.

The House observed a moment's silence.

1600

PETITIONS

CHILD CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services, Madeleine Meilleur, has decided that grandparents caring for their grandchildren no longer qualify for temporary care assistance; and

"Whereas the removal of the temporary care assistance could mean that children will be forced into foster care; and

"Whereas the temporary care assistance amounted to \$231 per month, much less than a foster family would receive to look after the same children if they were forced into foster care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately reverse the decision to remove temporary care assistance for grandparents looking after their grandchildren."

I support this petition and will pass it to page Zac.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition to stop the unlawful use of firearms in vehicles.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I support this petition and affix my name to it.

DIABETES TREATMENT

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition given to me by K. Booker of Pickering, Ontario:

"Whereas elementary school-aged children in the province of Ontario suffering from diabetes require regular blood sugar monitoring and may also require insulin and glucagon to manage their disease; and

"Whereas there is no medical or nursing assistance readily available in schools as there was in the past; and

"Whereas the parents/guardians of these children must currently visit their children's school several times throughout the day in order to test their child's blood sugar levels; and

"Whereas the absence of medical support in our elementary schools results in substantial stress and disruption to the lives of children and their working parents;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) That elementary schools in the province of Ontario have on-site staff trained in the daily monitoring of blood sugar levels of children who suffer from diabetes; and

"(2) That the trained staff also administer insulin and glucagon when required, with the consent of the child's parent/guardian."

As I agree with this petition, I affix my name thereto.

BATHURST HEIGHTS ADULT LEARNING CENTRE

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition to save the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there are over 2,000 adult ESL students being served by the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre, operated by the Toronto District School Board, in partnership with the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas this is the only English as a second language (ESL) learning centre in this area of the city located directly on the Spadina subway line, making it accessible for students across the city; and

"Whereas newcomers in Toronto, and in the Lawrence Heights area, need the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre so they can succeed in their career opportunities; and

"Whereas the proposed revitalization of Lawrence Heights threatens the existence of the centre;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that any revitalization of Lawrence Heights include a newcomer centre and ensure that the Bathurst Heights centre continues to exist in the present location."

I support this petition and affix my name to it.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mike Colle: This is part of the thousands of petitions I have had in support of taking guns out of cars.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I support taking guns off our streets, and I affix my name to this petition.

LUPUS

Mr. Charles Sousa: This petition reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

I sign the petition and submit it to Zac.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents;

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act as above to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the Clerks' table.

DIABETES TREATMENT

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition provided to me by Andrew Webster of Rockwood, Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas elementary school-aged children in the province of Ontario suffering from diabetes require regular blood sugar monitoring and may also require insulin and glucagon to manage their disease; and

"Whereas there is no medical or nursing assistance readily available in schools as there was in the past; and

"Whereas the parents/guardians of these children must currently visit their child's school several times throughout the day in order to test their child's blood sugar levels; and

"Whereas the absence of medical support in our elementary schools results in substantial stress and disruption to the lives of children and their working parents;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) That elementary schools in the province of Ontario have on-site staff trained in the daily monitoring of blood sugar levels of children who suffer from diabetes; and

"(2) That the trained staff also administer insulin and glucagon when required, with the consent of the child's parent/guardian."

As I agree with the content of these petitions, I affix my name thereto.

DRINKING AND DRIVING

Mr. Frank Klees: I have a petition signed by more than 300 students of Loretto Abbey secondary school in Toronto, and forwarded to me by Lina Naccarato, the school's child and youth worker. It reads as follows:

"Petition to the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas Tyler Mulcahy and his friends lost their lives in a tragic accident that could have been avoided; and

"Whereas young people must learn zero tolerance for drinking and driving to protect themselves from enduring tragedy that will severely impact them, their families and their friends; and

"Whereas, towards this end, young people need to acquire safe and responsible driving habits from as early an age as possible; and

"Whereas improved provincial driving laws can effectively contribute to the process of enhanced driver training and responsible habits among youth in this respect;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to call on the Ontario Ministry of Transportation to enact laws to revoke the licence of drivers 21 years of age and younger with alcohol in their bloodstream, and to also revoke their licence for speeding, for a period of from three months to one year, based upon the determined amount of alcohol or the level of speed involved."

And I will pass on this petition to the table.

1610

DIABETES TREATMENT

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition that was presented to my good friend from Cambridge by Hobart Food Equipment Group Canada, North York, Ontario. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas elementary school-aged children in the province of Ontario suffering from diabetes require regular blood sugar monitoring and may also require insulin and glucagon to manage their disease; and

"Whereas there is no medical or nursing assistance readily available in schools as there was in the past; and

"Whereas the parents/guardians of these children must currently visit their child's school several times throughout the day in order to test their child's blood sugar levels; and

"Whereas the absence of medical support in our elementary schools results in substantial stress and disruption to the lives of children and their working parents;

"We, the undersigned hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) That elementary schools in the province of Ontario have on-site staff trained in the daily monitoring of blood sugar levels of children who suffer from diabetes; and

"(2) That the trained staff also administer insulin and glucagon when required, with the consent of the child's parent/guardian."

I am pleased to present this petition to page Bradyn and sign it in support.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition signed by a number of constituents in Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents;

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal" relationships "between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act as above to emphasize the importance of

children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the Clerks' table.

DIABETES TREATMENT

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition provided to me by Nadine Ahrens of Kitchener, Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas elementary school-aged children in the province of Ontario suffering from diabetes require regular blood sugar monitoring and may also require insulin and glucagon to manage their disease; and

"Whereas there is no medical or nursing assistance readily available in schools as there" has been "in the past; and

"Whereas the parents/guardians of these children must currently visit their child's school several times" during "the day in order to test their child's blood sugar levels; and

"Whereas the absence of medical support in our elementary schools results in substantial stress and disruption to the lives of children and their working parents;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly ... as follows:

"(1) That elementary schools in the province of Ontario have on-site staff trained in the daily monitoring of blood sugar levels of children who suffer from diabetes; and

"(2) That the trained staff also administer insulin and glucagon when required, with the consent of the child's parent/guardian."

And as I agree with this petition, I affix my name thereto.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I want to inform the House that pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care concerning hospital deficits. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

Orders of the day.

Hon. David Caplan: I just want to say I was very dissatisfied with the question. However, Speaker, G126.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ROAD SAFETY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ ROUTIÈRE

Mr. Bradley moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 126, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and to make consequential amendments to two amending

acts / *Projet de loi 126, Loi modifiant le Code de la route et apportant des modifications corrélatives à deux lois modificatives.*

Hon. James J. Bradley: I rise in the House today to begin debate on legislation that, if the Legislature deems to pass it, would make Ontario's roads safer for drivers and everyone who shares the roads. I will share this time with my parliamentary assistant for transportation, Mike Brown, who will resume the debate in the Legislature when I have concluded my remarks.

I want to say at the beginning that I have consulted widely on the bill, previous to its construction as a bill and subsequent to its introduction in the Legislature, to determine, from members of the Legislature in particular, what views they have on this bill. I want to thank the two opposition critics, Mr. Klees and Mr. Bisson, for the comments they have offered in this House. Subsequent to that, Mr. O'Toole as well has had some comments that he has made, and other members of the Legislature, both on the government side and the opposition side, have commented on specific provisions of the bill. I must say that I'm all ears whenever my colleagues in the Legislature and the general public are commenting on legislation of this kind. So I thank them for providing that service, and all members of Legislature.

As I have said on many occasions, and we have seen some examples of it, particularly in traffic safety, I don't think there's any member of the House or any side of the House that has a monopoly on the concern for these matters nor on the good ideas. My predecessors as Ministers of Transportation have brought in legislation and regulations which have ensured that Ontario has, over the years, maintained a record as among the safest jurisdictions in all of North America in terms of road safety and we hope that to continue.

When we bring forward legislation to this House, our desire is, first and foremost, road safety. I know that some members of the opposition have worked with members of the government. I think of the bill on—for want of a better word—stunt driving and street racing; Mr. Klees worked on that, I think, with Ms. Cansfield at the time, who was bringing forward the bill, and was very helpful in bringing forward amendments and suggestions in that regard. I have noted that members of the Legislature have brought forward legislation as independent members—in other words, as private members—in the field of traffic safety that have been very helpful, and in other fields of transportation. I noted in another bill, that we don't have before us today, Mr. Bisson brought forward legislation to deal with carpooling, which I thought was helpful, and found its way into a previous bill. So I think that has been extremely helpful.

But I want to indicate to the House, first of all, that I have done some consulting. What happens with a bill of this kind is that, first of all, we sit down with ministry staff and often with those who enforce the laws of the province, and that is our police services. We try to determine what the concerns are out there, what are the statistics that are showing up, what are the trends that are

taking place. Ministry staff who are familiar with this on a daily basis bring forward their best advice and then we consult with others. For instance, in this legislation we had consultations on various aspects of it with the following groups: the Ontario Provincial Police, the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canada Safety Council, Ontario Students Against Impaired Driving, Ontario Community Council on Impaired Driving, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Canada's Smartrisk, Ontario Safety League, Insurance Bureau of Canada, Driving School Association of Ontario, the city of Toronto; the Association of Municipalities of Ontario; the Canadian Automobile Association; the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators; and Ontario driving schools, such as Young Drivers of Canada, Allstate driving school, and ABC Driving School.

As well, ministry staff also held consultation meetings with the Ontario Trucking Association, the Ontario School Bus Association, the Ontario Motor Coach Association, the Canadian Courier and Logistics Association, and the rental car industry on specific aspects of Bill 126.

So these don't simply emerge out of one person's mind as a favourite pet project. They happen after wide consultation with organizations that bring forward their proposals. Not all of those proposals make their way into this legislation. I know there were some who wanted the legislation to be more extensive, more comprehensive, more sweeping, than as it exists at the present time.

That is the kind of consultation which has taken place with this particular bill, and I want to thank each of those groups for helping.

In addition to that, letters have come in over the years to Ministers of Transportation with recommendations from people.

There are three different sets of people who are directly impacted by this.

Of course, one was Mr. Mulcahy, whose son died in a car accident. Mr. Mulcahy, you'll remember, had full-page ads in the newspapers. Meetings took place. I know that he met with the Premier. He met with the Leader of the Opposition, John Tory, who quickly endorsed what Mr. Mulcahy had to say and urged the Premier to take action based on that. I think he was in communication with the Conservative critic Mr. Klees, as well, on this matter. He may have been in consultation with the New Democratic Party as well. As a result of that, we have some personal experience that takes place.

There are others—Jan and Rob Perry of Clarksburg, Ontario, who lost a son in an accident. He phoned home to get a ride, was unable to get a ride, hopped in a vehicle with others, and they were all killed in a car accident, unfortunately.

Eleanor McMahon was also consulted on this and was there the day we announced it at the police headquarters in Toronto. In that particular case, it was a driver whose licence had been suspended. Her husband was an OPP officer—and a very tragic day for her. She was glad to see some of the provisions that are contained in this bill.

It's a pretty comprehensive bill. There has probably been a focus of attention on some of the issues within the bill more than others. I don't want to call it an omnibus bill, because when I was in opposition, I never liked omnibus bills. So I'll call it a comprehensive bill, which is extensive in its coverage of issues related to public safety as it relates to highways.

Here are some of the people who have commented on the bill.

Carolyn Swinson, a spokesperson for MADD Canada, stated:

"We've been advocating this for a long time.

"Manitoba has already brought that in—it's already zero blood alcohol for drivers up to the age of 21 and for the first five years for new drivers.

"We've been asking Ontario to follow suit for a while."

She went on to say, "Every time you get a whole group of teenagers in a car, the dynamic of that car changes. They get involved in risk behaviour that they wouldn't do normally—one of the major ones being not wearing seat belts."

Tim Mulcahy, the father of the youth who was tragically killed in a car accident, stated:

"Mr. McGuinty called me this morning and told me that both laws are being introduced into the Legislature on Tuesday.

"I could not believe my ears and wept with Mr. McGuinty on the phone. If these bills are passed, Ontario will be the safest jurisdiction for young drivers in the world."

Rob Solomon, a director for Mothers Against Drunk Driving, said, "Graduated licensing works to reduce death among beginning drivers, but the problem is, they're then exposed to alcohol and unsupervised driving—and skyrocketing rates of crashes, deaths and injuries."

Jan Perry, whom I made reference to, said the following when the bill was introduced: "I'm absolutely thrilled that they are recognizing that the risk of fatal crashes is partly because of the number of teenagers in a car. It's going to give new drivers a year of experience and maturity to recognize that driving is a responsibility and a privilege before they fill their car with friends and head down the highway."

Andrew Murie, the CEO of Mothers Against Drunk Driving Canada, said, "It's a good package of measures and it extends well beyond new drivers. It will save hundreds of lives."

Peter Christianson, the president of Young Drivers of Canada, said, "Since graduated licensing, there's been a huge reduction in accidents. They've been able to cut the number of fatalities by 30%. With these (new) changes they should be able to obtain another 30%."

Don Forgeron, vice-president, Insurance Bureau of Canada, said, "Often we get into debates about convenience and inconvenience. We seem to have forgotten that graduated licensing is a" good "program designed to help our new drivers become good, safe drivers. If I had to choose, I'd go for keeping kids alive."

Those were some of the comments that I initially received on this legislation. Subsequent to any bill being introduced in the House, further comments come in, and I have been impressed with the quality of many of the arguments that have been advanced, with the information that does come in, and indeed, I must say that there are some who have commented favourably and wanted us to go further. There are some who feel that the bill itself goes too far, in their view. I think that's a very healthy debate that takes place in our society.

I know that motor vehicle collisions cost our province dearly. Almost every day in Ontario, someone loses a loved one on our roads—someone's friend, a parent, a son or a daughter. There's nothing more tragic than the loss of a young person behind the wheel. The statistics tell us that teen drivers are, on average, about three and a half times more likely to be in a fatal collision than drivers aged, for instance, from 30 to 34. The evidence speaks for itself. We need to do more to keep our young and novice drivers safe.

Fourteen years ago, Ontario was the first jurisdiction in North America to introduce a comprehensive graduated licensing system. This program has been tremendously successful in preventing collisions among teen drivers. I want to say at this point that I commend a previous government of a different political stripe. It was the New Democratic Party that was in power at that time when it was introduced. I know it was controversial at the time and I know that there was significant opposition at that time. I voted in favour of it, but there were views that had been expressed to me and others at that time that they asked to have reflected in the House.

As a result of the debate, because I've been going through the debate, there were alterations and changes made to that legislation. That just goes back to the fact that the legislation best emerges when it's had considerable debate and discussion. I've indicated my great desire to see public hearings on all aspects of this bill and as much discussion as possible amongst the public, who will have views that are to be considered seriously.

Today, the number of fatalities and injuries among teen drivers is nearly 35% lower than before our graduated licensing program in this province was introduced. We are building on that safety success with improvements that deal with the realities of today's drivers. We plan to improve Ontario's graduated licensing system as we've been asked to do so. We want to give young and novice drivers more time to get the experience and skills they need for a lifetime of safe driving.

First, the proposal is that we would extend the time it takes to get a full licence from 24 months to 36 months. They're still entitled to a lot of privileges during that period of time, but a full licence would be 36 months. That gives them a lot of time to be able to acquire, I happen to think, very frankly, better habits than perhaps generations before have had, in terms of their driving.

We will still offer a possible time discount of six months for those who pass a ministry-approved beginner driving education course. Each year in Ontario, unfortunately, about 22 teenagers are killed and 139 severely

injured in crashes where teen drivers have teen passengers. Research shows that the risk of an at-fault collision for a teen driver increases with the number of young passengers in the vehicle. In fact, teen drivers with two teen passengers are more than twice as likely to be involved in a serious collision, according to compiled statistics, and collision statistics tell us that with three teen passengers in the car the likelihood of an at-fault collision increases nearly threefold.

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This is why we have proposed a new law that would extend our current teens-driving-teens passenger restriction to any time, day or night, for the first year of a G2 licence. That is the proposal we have made, although it is not contained in the legislation—proposed for a regulatory change. That is where we're likely getting the most comment and arguments for and against.

We know that tougher passenger restrictions can help save lives. Of course, this restriction does not apply to family members or to teen drivers who are accompanied by a driver who has been licensed for four years or more. Very often we find that when teens are somewhat young, they have an adult with them. By the second year of their G2, a teen driver will no longer be subject to this rule. So it would be one year in the proposal that is before the House.

For novice drivers who choose to ignore the rules of the road, we will introduce escalating sanctions for repeat violations of any of the conditions of the graduated licensing program. These escalating sanctions would apply to any novice driver convicted of any other offence under the Highway Traffic Act where the driver receives demerit points. This means that drivers would face penalties that get tougher with each serious violation of the province's traffic laws. As an example, for a first violation, the young driver would receive a 30-day licence suspension. A second violation would result in a 90-day suspension. Upon a third conviction, the driver would return to the start of the graduated licensing program.

As I've noted on many occasions, and I think when those of us who are adults chit-chat about these matters, invariably we will say that our younger drivers are probably more responsible than younger drivers were in previous generations, partly due to the graduated licensing program, but also due to the education programs we have and some of the legislative and regulatory changes that have been made.

One example I found—and we're still going to have to deal with this problem—is a better attitude than generations gone by about drinking and driving. When you ask parents, grandparents and great-grandparents what the attitude was many years ago, it certainly wasn't as responsible as it is today. But as all members are aware, drinking and driving continues to be a major problem on our roads, accounting for about one quarter of all fatal accidents.

Research shows that the peak ages for drinking and driving collisions are 19, 20 and 21. That is why the

proposed legislation, if passed, would create a new law requiring all drivers aged 21 and under to have a zero blood alcohol concentration whenever they are behind the wheel of a car. I know that's in the United States; I think it's in all states now. Young drivers who continue to drink and drive would face a 30-day driver's licence suspension and fines of up to \$500. If passed, Ontario would join several countries around the world with similar restrictions in place, such as the United States, Australia and Switzerland. In the United States alone, this law has been cited as one of the single most important reasons for a drop in young driver collisions.

Ontario has an outstanding road safety record. As I have said on many occasions, it's not something that began with this government. We've tried to contribute to it, but previous governments have worked hard as well to establish that record of safety. We're fortunate to live in a province where the latest statistics show we have the safest roads of any province or state in North America.

The proposed legislation will, if passed, keep Ontario at the forefront of road safety by helping to protect the lives of our young novice drivers and indeed others, because there are other provisions. I think my parliamentary assistant, Mike Brown, will be dealing with some of those other provisions as well.

I'd like to take this opportunity to share with members the words of OPP commander Bill Grodzinski. The reason I do this is, you think of police officers; you think of people from the fire department, firefighters; and you think of those who operate our ambulances, ambulance attendants. They're the ones who arrive at the accidents; they're the ones who have in their arms the person who has been killed or badly mangled. That is etched in their minds for a lifetime, particularly when it's a young person who is starting out in life. I know I've met with others out there, with firefighters, for instance—I remember a good friend of mine who was a baseball coach and he recounted going to an accident with young people in the car and one of the kids who was killed was a kid he had coached. So it had a very profound effect as he was extracting that young man from a vehicle, and the person was unfortunately killed on that occasion. Police officers will tell you this and ambulance attendants will tell you this, but here's what OPP commander Bill Grodzinski had to say: "This legislation is extremely positive and it should go a long way to reducing the toll of tragedies we see on our highways and our roadways on a daily basis. Those of us who have had to knock on the door in the middle of the night know that it is one of the most difficult, terrible jobs a police officer has to do. If this legislation saves even one door knock in the middle of the night, then it's valuable legislation." Commander Grodzinski, it is my sincere hope that this legislation will save you many knocks on parents' doors.

We want our young drivers to have the skills and experience they need to drive safely. We want to get for them the best start possible. I know that this legislation and many provisions within it can help to do that, and I encourage members to support the parts of the bill they

feel are going to be beneficial. I don't expect from members of the opposition, or indeed from members of the House or the public, unanimity. I would never be in a position—you know how you often hear the exchange in the House, if someone doesn't agree with a part of legislation, "Well, they don't care about traffic safety." Let's dismiss that from the beginning.

Any and every bill that comes before this House deserves significant analysis. So if someone disagrees with a provision in this bill, that doesn't mean that person has any less concern about the safety of young people or other people in vehicles than we have on the government side or I happen to have as Minister of Transportation. I think that's a very bogus and unfair argument when that takes place. I want to assure members when they comment on the bill that I believe what they're doing is coming from a sense of sincerity and a sense of their judgment on what is found to work best in this field.

There are many provisions, and as I say, I think my colleague is going to deal with some of the other provisions, because I'm going touch on some of the ones that exist. There are drinking and driving initiatives that I've described, particularly for young people, but others.

There's requiring a second breath test for drivers who have blown in the "warn" range—that's 0.05—to be performed in a more timely manner. That is another roadside device. The purpose of that is to save the police hauling them back to the police station. I guess it might change if you're going back to the police station, as well, if you took enough time. It's also a terrible use of officers' time. We think it can be done at roadside.

Again, requiring a seven-day roadside impoundment of vehicles: This will occur when the vehicle has been driven by a person whose blood alcohol content is over the legal limit of 0.08, or who fails or refuses to provide a breath sample. These drivers are now subject to a 90-day roadside driver's licence suspension. What we have there is an impoundment of that vehicle.

When the vehicle they are driving is not equipped with an ignition interlock device when driven by someone who specifically is driving only under the condition of having an interlock device, that will show up on their driver's licence. If they are driving in contravention of that, they're going to get the kinds of impoundments that are necessary.

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Suspended licence initiatives: My friend the Conservative critic and I have discussed this on many occasions. He's raised it in the House, the nuisance—it's more than a nuisance—the offence of people driving when their licences are suspended, particularly suspended for violations of the Highway Traffic Act. There we are expanding the circumstances to which vehicle impoundment applies to include drivers who continue to drive while their licence is under suspension under the Highway Traffic Act. Currently, the vehicle impoundment program applies to drivers who have been suspended for convictions under the Criminal Code. Our proposal is to add a seven-day impoundment for suspensions under the

Highway Traffic Act, including drivers suspended for non-payment of family support but not including suspensions for non-payment of fines or medical suspensions. So there is a provision in there; we're not trying to be oppressive but we are trying to expand the conditions under which there can be impoundment.

Other improvements: fines being considered for increase. I won't go through them all other than to say careless driving, failure to stop at a red light or a portable red light, failure to stop for emergency vehicles—a number of these. Failure to remain, render assistance, give required information, failure to wear a seat belt or secure a child—all of these violations contribute to injury and sometimes death in the province.

Faster clearance after highway incidents: the proposal to extend liability protection to service providers such as heavy tow truck operators who are directed by the police to clear the highway after an accident.

Clarity of the use of a slow-moving vehicle sign: People in the farm area are particularly interested in that.

All in all, there are many changes; some of them are listed as housekeeping.

On the bicycle one: I think Mr. Klees was asking me about that, and a note came in. It says that anyone riding an e-bike, an electronic bike, must be 16 years of age or older and wear a helmet. It's not for regular bikes; it is for e-bikes, I am informed by my officials. The member will perhaps elaborate on that, and if there's a need for a change, he and I will work together on that.

What we have before us is a very comprehensive piece of legislation. The parliamentary assistant will elaborate on the bill. I will look forward to reading the Hansard, perhaps even watching the replay of the critics for the Conservatives and the NDP, because I will not be able to be here in person, and you can't really capture the emotion of the day when you're not here in person. So I ask their forgiveness in this and I will make sure that I read the Hansard and, if I get a chance, I'll watch the late-night replay of it because I'm genuinely interested in what both these gentlemen and others in this House who have a particular interest in highway safety have to say about this legislation. You may make suggestions to me as to how the legislation can be improved, altered or amended. You may suggest additions that might be there or what you may like to see in a future piece of legislation that may not be contained in this legislation.

I look forward to all of that. This House works best, as my colleagues know, when there's a sense of collegiality on the issues that take place; when there's not a constant hammering and division. I was watching the federal House this week, and I think there's a contrast between this House and the federal House. I want to attribute that in no small part to the personalities who are contained in this House and their very responsible approach to legislative initiatives and subsequent regulatory initiatives.

The last thing I wanted to say is, as I have mentioned, that some of what we have talked about that could flow from this bill would be in regulation. So not only do I want a full discussion of the bill itself, the legislation, but

I also want to undertake to consult my colleagues when we are preparing the final regulations to go with it, and also to give some undertakings, perhaps before the bill goes out to committee or after it's completed with committee, to say what we won't do or what we will do with regulation and give a firm commitment on that, as opposed to simply consultation. The consultation is important, but I think members will be looking for firm commitments in that regard.

Thank you to the members of the House for indulging me, and I will now pass along to my good friend the member for Algoma-Manitoulin the opportunity to elaborate on this comprehensive piece of legislation, but not an omnibus bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The Chair recognizes the member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I'm delighted to have the opportunity to follow my friend and colleague the minister in the discussion of this important piece of legislation. I want to assure members of the House that I and the minister will be here to hear all the comments that are made on this bill. We will be taking into consideration all the views that are put before us not only in this House but that we hear across the province on this particular piece of legislation. It is a comprehensive piece of legislation. It is a piece of legislation that will affect most Ontarians directly and all Ontarians indirectly.

I'm pleased to report that past legislation in this House has been effective. This province has earned one of the best road safety records in North America. This is an achievement we have maintained for more than a decade. Our laws and our regulatory measures have toughened the province's seat belt, child car seat and booster seat rules. We introduced new legislation a few weeks ago that will, if passed, make it illegal to use hand-held wireless communications and electronic entertainment devices while driving. We have targeted street racers and other aggressive drivers. For over a year now, drivers who continue to race, speed excessively or perform other driving stunts will have their licences and vehicles taken away from them immediately at roadside.

We, as the government, have delivered needed changes to Ontario's drinking and driving laws. In Ontario, drinking drivers face some of the toughest penalties in North America. Convicted drunk drivers face stiff fines, licence suspensions, mandatory alcohol education or treatment, and an ignition interlock program. New measures are now in place to seize and forfeit vehicles belonging to repeat drunk drivers.

Along with the police and our road safety partners in communities across the province, we are raising awareness about the dangers of drinking and driving. In 2005, Ontario had the lowest alcohol-related road fatality rate in North America. This is part of a long-term trend that has seen drinking and driving fatalities drop by more than 60% in our province since 1988.

We will be putting in place new sanctions for drivers with a blood alcohol concentration from 0.05 to 0.08, what is now referred to as the warn range. Yet despite all

our ongoing efforts, about one quarter of all fatal collisions in Ontario are alcohol-related. Drinking and driving is just one example of why we can never stop looking for new ways to improve our laws to make our roads safe.

On average, about two people are killed and 10 are seriously injured on Ontario's roads every day. Many of those collisions are preventable. To combat some of the most dangerous driver behaviours on our roads today, the proposed legislation would mean tougher fines and penalties for some of the most serious highway traffic offences and give police more effective enforcement tools that they need to help keep our roads safe. The legislation, if passed, will take a tougher approach to dealing with drivers who continue to get behind the wheel of a car when their licence is suspended or when they are impaired.

To help police get drunk drivers off our roads, the bill would give police the authority to impound for seven days the vehicles of drivers who blow over the legal limit or refuse a breath test. Police would also be able to impound vehicles that are being driven without an ignition interlock device when driven by a motorist who is required to have one of those devices.

Research suggests that up to three quarters of suspended drivers continue to drive despite having a suspended licence. Drivers suspended for driver-related reasons, such as drunk driving or speeding are about four times as likely to crash as drivers suspended for non-driving-related reasons, such as not paying fines. That is why the proposed legislation would also give police the ability to impound vehicles driven by suspended drivers at roadside. These are the drivers who put our lives and the lives of our loved ones at risk. These are the drivers that we do not want on our roads.

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Safer roads is a McGuinty government priority. Our proposed legislation would make Ontario roads even safer by getting dangerous drivers off our roads immediately. This is a comprehensive bill. It is a bill that moves road safety forward in Ontario. I urge all members to support this legislation. I will be listening carefully to all suggestions from all members.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I look forward to, possibly on another day, getting an opportunity to respond to this bill more fully, but I just want to say upfront that we as New Democrats, along with most members of this House, support two of the provisions of this bill, either strongly or loosely. The first one, the zero blood alcohol limit for a young person, is not a bad idea. I think the debate we need to get into is: Should we extend that to all drivers? Does it have to be zero? I think zero is problematic for all kinds of reasons, which we can talk about a little bit later, but maybe we need to have a debate in this Legislature about reducing the blood alcohol limit for all drivers so that we're not seen as being discriminatory to young people.

The issue of zero tolerance when it comes to speed—I understand that, and I know why the government is doing

it, and I guess there is a certain appetite to do that within the society of Ontario. However, it's certainly impractical. I know in talking to police officers across the province, since I've had a chance to engage in dialogue with people on this bill, it's going to be pretty difficult for police officers to actually charge people if they're doing five or 10 kilometres over, because no police officer wants to be the one when it results in a young person losing their driver's licence, which is so essential to everyday life in many parts of this province. They tell me there are already mechanisms in law now that allow them to withdraw licences if they think the young person is being very unsafe.

The bigger issue, and that is the one of limiting the number of passengers in the car, is the real flashpoint in this bill. We need to get into a discussion in this Legislature, and more importantly, later, a discussion with citizens, as to, how can we achieve our goal, if our goal is to really try to make people safer behind the wheel? I agree with that, and I think it comes down to two things: driver responsibility—driving is not a right, but a responsibility—and the issue of training. I'll get a chance to speak to that a little bit later, but this has certainly caught the attention of many young people across this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm pleased to join and make comment on what was just stated by our Minister of Transportation, Mr. Bradley, and his parliamentary assistant, Mr. Brown.

Bill 126 has a lot of component parts, all driven by the issue of bringing safety to our highways for those drivers and all others who are on the highway with them. I did take note that the minister took a great bit of time to talk about his willingness to listen to the ongoing debate that will flow today and into other afternoons and mornings around Bill 126. He talked about wanting to hear of any good ideas, other consultation, additions and perhaps amendments that could go into this bill to strengthen it and make it more reliable in its future use.

There is a large component of this bill that is addressing our younger drivers, our beginning drivers. There is a part on zero blood alcohol content for those under 21. Drinking and driving is still a factor in about a quarter of all road fatalities. In the 10 years up to 2005, inclusive, 233 drivers aged under 22 were killed in drinking and driving collisions. That's a number that is simply too large; one would be a tragedy.

Drinking drivers aged 19, 20 and 21 have the highest rates of involvement in both fatal collisions and collisions overall. I found it interesting to note that their involvement rate in fatal-injury collisions is 28% higher than drivers who are in a category three years older than them. So we have these statistics and they are—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I did listen intently to the magnanimous tone of the Minister of Transportation, Mr. Bradley, and his parliamentary assistant, Mr. Brown, from Algoma-Manitoulin.

I really am quite interested in the remarks that will soon be made by our critic, Frank Klees. He's been on top of this file, some would say, from the conceptualization stage, so a lot of what we expect to hear from our critic is on the record.

I think the minister missed an opportunity here. I agree—I have spoken with him on it and followed this very closely as the parent of five young people. I'm just saying that there's an oversimplification here and it sort of targets all young people a bit unfairly; at least the language does, or at least that's the intent. They feel threatened. I think some consultation has to occur there.

I'm interested in our critic's response to this because I think the minister would be wise to follow some of the advice that may show up as recommendations or amendments on how to implement this successfully.

We don't want to characterize all young people as being careless and irresponsible; that is simply the wrong message. And just realizing that—even as early as a couple of months ago, right after the tragic events that precipitated this legislation, Mr. Klees and Mr. Tory were in touch with the families, and indeed, too, Dalton McGuinty, the Premier. So there was some pressure.

Respectfully, there is some consensus here that the alcohol provision is something that I think you will find unanimous support for here—unconditionally, really.

There are some other provisions—some of the fines, and some of the suspensions and fines and administrative costs for young people could be somewhat prohibitive.

I think that there would be a lot accomplished here by looking at driver education, improving and enhancing that so young people are familiar with the statistics of risk.

Again, I submit to Mr. Brown from Algoma-Manitoulin—but I'm also looking forward to the member from Newmarket-Aurora, who has a great history on this file.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? Response?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I appreciate the comments from the members from Timmins-James Bay and Chatham-Kent-Essex and the member for Durham.

I would like to reflect upon the member from Durham and his interest in what the next speaker is about to say. The next speaker, as a former Minister of Transportation, knows this file well and has worked on various road safety issues in his capacity as the minister and in his capacity here in the House. I am also interested in hearing what our friend Mr. Klees has to say.

To our friend from Timmins-James Bay: You're right; driving is a privilege, not a right. It does have age discrimination at both ends of the spectrum, not just with young drivers but with seniors. There is age discrimination, and I think we have to recognize that.

We also have to recognize that insurance companies do exactly the same thing. One of the things that young drivers might be interested in knowing and reflecting upon is if we can reduce the number of collisions that are amongst that particular subset of drivers—those younger

than 25—we would no doubt see a reflection of decreased insurance rates amongst that particular class of folks.

I think the government understands the issue around passengers in vehicles—young passengers in vehicles, that is. That is something that we are hearing much about. As we clarify what it actually means, I think that might be helpful to the debate. I think there's some confusion about that. We look forward to all of those issues being raised in the next few days.

1700

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? The member for Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased that you got the riding right. We're almost at the end of this session of the Legislature, and you got it. I'm impressed.

In the time I have available, I'll attempt to set out the official opposition's position on Bill 126 at this stage of the legislative process. I say "at this stage," because while we're engaged in second reading debate, this is really our first opportunity as members of this House to debate this bill following its tabling on November 18.

We did not have an opportunity to provide input to the legislation as currently drafted. The minister made reference earlier to the fact that he consulted broadly in the drafting of the legislation. Unfortunately, the way this place works—perhaps the public would have a difficult time understanding it; I've been here for some 13 years now, and I have a difficult time understanding it—is that while the government is in the process of drafting legislation, they do consult with stakeholders, but the last people to hear about it are the people in this place. It's often not until the day the legislation is tabled that we, even as critics, see the legislation for the first time. Then, of course, as you know, Speaker, we're expected to respond to the minister's announcement that day within minutes, and in some cases we have had no more than five minutes to actually review the statement and the legislation.

Perhaps at some point along the way, when we really do agree, as members of this place, that we should have a more co-operative way of working here, and members of the opposition are included in the process of developing legislation much earlier—I'm sure backbenchers feel the same way—then the government won't feel they need to defend the first draft of legislation. I too often find that governments of all stripes—I was there; I know what it's like. You've done the best you can, you draft legislation and you bring it forward for first reading, and then you feel from that point on that you have to defend everything that's there notwithstanding the fact that perhaps members of the opposition and the public may well have some input that would enhance and improve the legislation.

While there are aspects of this legislation that we support and indeed welcome—I have expressed that to the minister—we do have serious concerns about other aspects, and we'll be calling on the government to amend the legislation and give its undertaking not to proceed

with certain regulatory changes related to this legislation that the minister announced he intends to implement before we would give our support to the bill.

Since the tabling of the proposed legislation, there has been a great deal of public interest and a lot of reaction, a considerable amount of it quite negative and a lot of that reaction coming from young people who will be directly affected by this proposed legislation. Much of that public response—in fact, I would say probably all the public response—has been focused on three specific aspects of the bill. I want to address those three areas and then deal with the other legislative changes contained in the bill.

The first is zero tolerance for any level of blood alcohol concentration in drivers 21 years of age and younger. The second involves escalated sanctions for novice drivers, which include a 30-day licence suspension for the first speeding conviction—and that is any speeding conviction. The third is a proposal to restrict G2 drivers from carrying more than one passenger aged 19 and under at any time during the first year of G2.

First I want to address the provision to extend the zero blood alcohol concentration requirement to all drivers who are 21 years of age or younger. I think it's important to clarify that under the existing graduated licensing program it's already the law that G1 and G2 drivers must have zero blood alcohol concentration. A lot of people in the province don't understand that and feel that somehow this legislation catapults into the zero-tolerance area. That's simply not the case. The G1 category of licence has a duration of one year, and that's reduced to eight months if the driver completes an approved driver education course. It also carries certain restrictions, such as that the driver must be accompanied by a fully licensed driver who's been licensed for four years, and that accompanying driver must also have a blood alcohol concentration of less than .05 in case that person needs to drive while with the novice driver.

The additional restrictions that the G1 driver has are that, first, he or she cannot drive on Ontario's 400-series highways or on high-speed expressways unless accompanied by a qualified instructor. He cannot drive between midnight and 5 a.m. I think, again, the minister made reference to the improvements in safety amongst young drivers ever since this graduated driver's licensing system was implemented in the province of Ontario. It was the right thing to do. We now have very firm statistics that demonstrate that these restrictions have, without question, saved lives and reduced injuries. It was the right thing to do, and I think all members on all sides of the House would agree with that.

The G2 category of licence also has very specific restrictions. It lasts a minimum of 12 months and has the followings restrictions: A teen G2 driver can carry passengers from midnight to 5 a.m. as follows: For the first six months, G2 drivers 19 or under can carry only one passenger aged 19 or under; after the first six months, and until the G2 driver earns the full G licence or turns 20, three passengers aged 19 or under, and there are exemptions for family members or an accompanying

driver who meets the requirements of the accompanying driver in G1.

It's important to note that for each conviction for violating any one of the G1 or G2 restrictions, a novice driver currently receives a 30-day licence suspension. So the concept of this 30-day licence suspension is not new. I think that, again, it's important for the public who are watching this debate and who are interested in this debate to understand the context of where the government started on this legislation and where it has come to. Young drivers, novice drivers who up to this point, under the current existing law, violate any one of those G1 or G2 restrictions that I have mentioned are subject to a 30-day licence suspension as it exists.

The proposed change in Bill 126 as it relates to blood alcohol would be to extend that zero blood alcohol concentration requirement beyond the G1 and G2 licence categories to include all young drivers who are 21 years of age or younger. This is where, of course, the controversy comes in and where some have concerns as to whether this legislation has gone too far.

1710

I believe I'm correct in saying that the impetus for this change was driven, really, by two factors. The first is the overwhelming statistical evidence that drivers aged 19 to 21 are overrepresented in drinking and driving collisions and teen drivers are three and a half times more likely to be involved in a fatal collision than drivers aged 30 to 34. Those are hard statistics. They are statistics that are readily available to us. It's in the context of those statistics that I know the government wants to ensure that we do whatever is possible to improve road safety and the safety of not only young drivers, but all drivers on our roads.

In Canada as a whole, alcohol use by drivers is a factor in almost 30% of deaths from vehicle crashes. The proportion of fatalities caused by drinking and driving has decreased only marginally between 1996 and 2001 and, again, 2003 to 2005. More than 36% of drinking drivers involved in all fatal crashes were aged 16 to 24. This is according to the federal fact sheet on these issues. A Quick Look at Alcohol-Related Crashes in Canada is the name of the study. It goes on to articulate that single-vehicle fatal drinking-and-driving crashes had a higher percentage of young adult drivers than multi-vehicle crashes and about 35% of drinking drivers in fatal single-vehicle crashes were aged 16 to 24. That's compared to about 27% of those in fatal multi-vehicle crashes.

I'm not convinced that this statistic tells the whole story. I don't believe that this is so much a function of the age of the driver as the level of experience and, for that reason, I would ask the government to consider amending this part of the legislation to place the focus on experience rather than age. Essentially, we have done that with the graduated licensing program that we have in place. It does not target specifically the age of the driver, but it talks about the incidence of when you make an application for a new driver's licence: for the first year, for 18 months or 24 months. It targets, specifically, the issue of

experience. The more inexperienced the driver is, the more restrictions there should be on that licence.

I know the parliamentary assistant made reference to the fact—and it was in response to the third party's critic, when he made reference to the possibility of discrimination and that that was his concern with regard to focusing on age 21, for example. The parliamentary assistant made reference to the fact that we already have discrimination because we have certain restrictions for older drivers. Once you get to a certain age, you have to go back in and do your regular tests and so on. There are discriminatory issues, of course, relating to the insurance industry as well. But I would point out that I think a lot of that has to do, again, with the issue of ability. One has to assume responsibility as a government—as a Legislature, we do—to ensure that our roads are safe, for example, and that people who have the privilege of a licence indeed qualify, not only in terms of experience, but also medical conditions. There are issues such as sight; there are medical issues that come into play, and for that reason we have to be much more focused in terms of qualifications, at both ends of the age spectrum as well as, really, people of all ages.

However, I want to make this point—and I'm going to ask the minister to give consideration to rethinking this issue of the age 21 limit. I'm going to ask that he consider our proposal to have this section amended, to replace the wording “21 years of age or younger” with “novice driver,” and that we work with the ministry to arrive at the appropriate definition of “novice,” such that it reflects a specific number of years that the driver has been licensed. That will help us get to the issue of experience and competence, in terms of being able to drive more safely on our roads. We believe that would achieve the intent of the legislation but would avoid what could well be claimed as age discrimination by this section of the bill.

The second impetus for this zero-tolerance provision, I can safely say, came from the efforts of the Mulcahy family. The minister made reference to this again today, as he did when he introduced the bill. That initiative was launched by Tim Mulcahy, following the death of his son Tyler in a tragic crash that resulted not only in Tyler's death, but also the death of two friends. Tyler Mulcahy's grieving father, Tim, began a campaign with full-page newspaper ads addressed to the Premier that basically called on the Premier to give consideration to changing legislation that would ensure that other young drivers would have the benefit of the protection of the law of Ontario, that would, hopefully, protect them from the same tragedy.

Tim Mulcahy's personal website collected more than 6,500 names on his law change petition. Many more have been sent and have been tabled in the Legislature. I had the opportunity to present a number of those petitions here as well.

I met with Mr. Mulcahy in my office. He spoke of his passion to be able to have a positive influence on future lives.

On behalf of our caucus—and I know that I speak on behalf of all members of this Legislature—I extend our sincerest condolences to the Mulcahys and the other families who are grieving and their friends. I want to encourage them, because while their loss is unimaginable, they have turned that loss into a lasting legacy reflected in this legislation. Their purpose was to do what they could to save the lives of other young people and prevent other families from feeling the loss that they've had to endure and, frankly, will continue to endure.

This legislation, when passed, will do what the Mulcahy family intended in their efforts, so I want to acknowledge their efforts and thank them for their perseverance in bringing this about.

The second proposed change that has received considerable public attention is the escalated sanctions for novice drivers for speeding convictions.

Again, I think it's important to understand what the existing penalties are for novice drivers to fully appreciate the proposed changes. Currently, for each conviction for violating a G1 or a G2 restriction, a novice driver receives a 30-day licence suspension. What this legislation will do is extend that 30-day suspension to Highway Traffic Act violations such as a speeding ticket.

Essentially, the way the legislation is written now, with the first speeding violation that any novice driver has, there would be an automatic 30-day licence suspension. The second speeding conviction would carry a 90-day suspension, and the third conviction would result in a return to the start of the G1 category of licence, together with all of the restrictions inherent in that G1 category.

I've advised the minister that we will not be supporting this proposed change, and we've asked him to reconsider making the regulatory changes that would in fact implement these proposals relating to the speeding convictions.

1720

I fully understand, and I'm sure all of us in this House understand, the intent and support the objective that the minister is trying to achieve. The idea of suspending a young driver's licence for 30 days for a speeding infraction is clearly to cause young people to think twice, to be more responsible behind the wheel. All of us here drive. I don't know that there would be a member of this House who on occasion hasn't glanced down to see that they were five miles, 10 miles or 15 miles over the speed limit; that happens unintentionally.

Interjection.

Mr. Frank Klees: Even though the honourable member tells me, with a straight face, that it never happens to him—

Hon. John Wilkinson: It's kilometres.

Mr. Frank Klees: Okay, kilometres. That's what it was; 5 kilometres.

Interjection.

Mr. Frank Klees: Well, it dates me. Speaker, the fact that I referred to miles per hour puts me into about the same age category as you, I think.

So the point, very simply, that I'm making is that we all find ourselves from time to time with that needle just a little bit beyond the speed limit. I don't think any of us in this place would want to be in a situation where, because of a five-mile or a 10-mile infraction, we lose our licence for 30 days. I think all of us here would argue that the penalty is not at all related to the infraction. There's no correlation there. If we can argue that on our behalf, then we should be arguing that on behalf of young drivers in our province as well.

The unintended consequence of this well-intended measure proposed by the Ministry of Transportation is that there would be hardships experienced by young people across this province. Many young people rely on their licence to get to and from school or work, and in many parts of this province the car is the only way of transportation. Many areas of our province just don't have alternative modes of transportation. Many families count on their son or their daughter to be able to make their own way to community activities, and in many circumstances young people involved in sporting teams, Scouts, cadets and other community groups rely on each other for carpooling to get to and from those locations. The unintended consequence of this proposed measure can be far-reaching and seriously impact young people and their families.

We would support more stringent penalties, perhaps even suspensions for more serious violations, but those, I would submit, should be equal across the board. Whether someone is a novice driver or not, I think that the signal from the government that there are serious penalties for speeding is something that we will all accept. But I do think that we have to be careful and not overreact, which I believe this provision of the legislation—or, actually, it will be incorporated into regulation. We would hope that the minister would do as he committed that he would, and that is to listen to the debate, and that he would have further public consultation as well, and that he would rethink this aspect of his proposal.

A starting point for input for the minister could well be the Facebook site that has been launched, specifically in his honour, I think. There are thousands of submissions to the minister, trying to get his attention on that issue and on the next issue, which I'm going to speak to now, and that is the third proposal announced by the minister when he tabled Bill 126. It has proven, without question, to be the most controversial. It's attracted the most universal opposition, not only from young people but also from parents right across this province. The irony is that it's a proposal that actually is found nowhere in the legislation, it's found nowhere in Bill 126, but it would be implemented, again, through regulation in the context of this bill. That regulation would restrict teenage G2 drivers from carrying more than one young passenger aged 19 and under at any time during the first year of G2.

I say that it's the most controversial, and I also believe that this is something the minister, in the short time that he's had an opportunity to hear the reaction, not only from myself and other members of the Legislature, I'm

sure, but also from the public—and as I mentioned before, there are Facebook sites. He no doubt has received many more e-mails. I have a number here that I'm going to take the time to read into the record for the minister's benefit and for the benefit of all members of the House. I have received e-mails from across the province, and I believe that's because of my role as official opposition critic for transportation. I'm going to concentrate on the e-mails that I've received from my own riding of Newmarket–Aurora. The points that are made are practical. In many cases the writers of these e-mails have asked me to bring their concerns to the attention of the government, and by reading them into the record I am doing that.

The first e-mail I received comes from Robert Kennedy in Aurora and it reads as follows:

"I am concerned about the provincial government's proposed changes to drivers' regulations in Ontario.

"My understanding of these proposed changes is such that it will affect my volunteer work with Royal Canadian Army Cadets and Scouts Canada.

"Also, it will affect my life as a parent of a 17-year-old.

"In the first case, our 18-year-old senior cadets, our over-18-year-old members of regular and militia units in the Canadian Forces, will not be able to drive cadets to activities, camping, courses etc. because of the new regulations. Also, our younger officer cadets: Officers or adult volunteers will not be able to drive to events because of the regulations.

"In Scouts Canada, there are also some leaders between the ages of 18 and 21 who will not be able to drive older Scouts and Venturers to events because of the proposed regulations.

"Personally, myself and other parents will be affected by our children's work. No longer will they be able to carpool after work because of their ages and the regulations. This will require more cars to go to their work spot so that our children can come home in twos or parents will have to go to workplaces late at night (i.e., my son Haig regularly works at Metro from 3:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.)

"At school, Haig is manager of the snowboard team for Aurora High School. These regulations would mean parents would have to drive to drop the students off for early morning snowboard team practices and races.

"Honourable sir, please make my views known to the appropriate minister.

"Very sincerely yours,

"Robert S. Kennedy" of Aurora.

By reading this into the record, I have done as requested. I know that the minister will take this view into consideration.

The next e-mail I have is from Sarah Stewart, who writes as follows:

"I am very concerned about some of the proposed new laws for teenage drivers. I do think that it is a good idea to have a zero-tolerance policy for teenagers driving with any alcohol in their blood; however, the limit on one

teenaged passenger when another teenager is driving is very impractical.

1730

"As a member of my church youth group who can drive, there are often some that need a ride home from the group. If I am no longer able to drive them, they may not be able to attend.

"This law may also increase the number of teenage drivers on the road, as a group of six teenagers wanting to go somewhere would no longer be able to take one car but three, creating a worse situation for the environment as well as increased road congestion.

"As a teenage driver, I've been using my driving privileges responsibly. I feel that I, as well as all of the other teenage drivers who are driving safely, should not be penalized.

"Sincerely,

"Sarah Stewart," from Aurora.

It's interesting. Sarah makes the point in her e-mail that she supports the zero-tolerance policy for alcohol concentration. I don't know if other members have found the same, but consistently the submissions I've had from young people state precisely that. The vast majority of young people say that they have no objection to and agree with zero tolerance for alcohol concentration, but they strenuously oppose particularly this restriction on the number of passengers in vehicles.

The next e-mail comes from, again, a high school student. Her name is Lorena Camargo. It reads as follows:

"I am a high school student presently in grade 11 at Sacred Heart Catholic High School in Newmarket who would be immediately affected by this law if it were to pass. It concerns me on certain points that I believe to be too severe.

"With the zero tolerance, I completely agree. There should be not one ounce of alcohol on anyone that gets in front of a wheel.

"What concerns me, and many students I have recently discussed this topic with, is the fact that we will only be able to ride with one passenger between the ages of 16 and 19 while we are young drivers. This is such a huge inconvenience for everyone, I don't even know where to begin.

"Firstly, a topic that is always being promoted is being environmentally friendly. I am sorry, but by reducing the amount of people in a car just because of their age, that will reduce people's abilities to carpool. Teenagers who drive to school together and aren't offered bus service would now have to find another way. Teenagers' lives, who have to work until 12 or 1 in the morning on weekends, would become more stressful because they can't carpool to work or back.

"In cases of emergencies, such as someone is sick, or your parents can't pick you up and you found out last minute, you would be so disabled if there were more than just one person who is the same age as you and also needed a ride. How is that just or fair?

"Over time, the world has stressed on equality and letting young people of today grow to be responsible and

independent people. I am very aware of the tragedies that have occurred, but I see no reason to punish to such an extreme the many responsible teenage drivers who would never do such things.

"I believe that together we can find a way, a better solution, something not so absolute."

I agree with Lorena and that's why we're proposing to the minister to hear us on behalf of young drivers, on behalf of parents across the province, and to make a commitment to us that he will not proceed with that part of the bill's intention, that he will not in fact move to draft regulations that would impose those restrictions.

I have an e-mail here from Haig Kennedy, again from Aurora. I'd like to read his letter to the minister.

"I am a 17-year-old student from Aurora. I am writing this e-mail to voice my concerns about the amendments to driving regulations trying to be passed.

"Firstly, the one-passenger rule is simply not going to work. It takes away the right to freedom of teens to go and see a movie or go to the mall, or whatever, with their friends because they would not be able to all take one vehicle. This will mean that a lot will either not go, or the parking lots" will be jammed, traffic jams, and we'll lose friends.

"Secondly, the punishments for speeding are far too severe. A lot of people would not be able to get around to work or school, because they would either have lost their licence from going a little too fast or just being ... afraid that they might. Teens would not be able to do the things they need to do."

That is from Haig Kennedy in Aurora. It's interesting that he makes the two points I made with the minister earlier; that is, that on these two parts of this bill, we cannot support him. We're looking for him to hear not only Haig but many thousands of young people like him—and as we've heard, parents as well—and commit to amending his legislation, and make a commitment to us in this House that he will not proceed with the amendments that would put those provisions in place.

The next e-mail is from Greg Leroux. Greg lives in Newmarket. He's a 21-year-old university student. He writes:

"I am a constituent with concerns over the recent proposed bill to alter driving regulations on persons under the age of 21.

"I can appreciate the need to curb the dangerous driving habits of the under 21 demographic. Unfortunately, I believe the bill in question could have severe unintended negative consequences.

"Though the majority of drivers under 21 years of age are students, many hold full-time jobs (and many of the students work full-time in the summer). To get to these jobs, a commute downtown is often necessary. During these commutes, it's impractical—and sometimes downright dangerous—to drive slower than the speed of traffic. Suspending the licence of a youth caught driving the speed of traffic during a morning commute wouldn't make the roads safer, and would only serve to ruin the job prospects of a responsible citizen."

To Greg's point, I drive from Aurora to Queen's Park four days a week when the House is sitting. On Highway 404, unless it's going nowhere because of congestion, when traffic is moving, the speed of traffic is between 110 and 120, and if you're driving slower than that, quite frankly, you're creating some problems on that highway. Police officers will tell you that if you're not driving the speed of traffic, they actually have the ability to ticket you for that very reason, because it could be considered dangerous driving.

So Greg Leroux makes a very practical point. As a young person, if he knows that the law of Ontario is such that he can lose his licence for 30 days for any speeding violation, what is his choice? It's a predicament we don't want to put Greg or any other young person into, and I thank him for his submission.

The final e-mail I want to read comes to us from Jason Edwards. He writes as follows: "I urge you to oppose this legislation, or at least the points highlighted above"—he had made reference to the single passenger and expressed concern about zero tolerance for speeding. In his submission he indicated, with regard to the zero tolerance for drinking—he doesn't support drinking and driving—that there's a concern that if there is zero tolerance at all times, you run the risk of losing your licence even if perhaps there is some detection of alcohol for other reasons.

1740

I have heard—in fact, we have a paper that I'm going to be delivering to the minister—that the equipment that's used to test alcohol concentration could well pick up other substances, such as mouthwash. It could well pick up other substances. For example, if someone happens to be at a Christmas party and has a rum ball dessert, the very fact that the flavouring is there and that there is some small content of alcohol could create a serious problem. So while Jason is expressing his support, he also raises that caution that I believe we have to have some discussion about in committee, and the minister has agreed to listen to some of these things. Hopefully we can provide within the context of this legislation some understanding and some flexibility and latitude for the circumstances that Jason Edwards presents.

With regard to these three major points that I've made, I want to reiterate to the minister that we cannot support the legislation as it is presented to us, we cannot support the concept of not allowing more than one passenger for young people in their cars, we cannot support the zero tolerance for a speeding violation at any point, and we will be looking to the minister to provide with us amendments and to provide a commitment that he will reconsider those provisions.

With regard to the first point, zero tolerance for alcohol content, there's broad support for that. We're hoping, when this bill comes to a vote, even the vote on second reading, that the minister will have come to us and given us those commitments that there will be changes and that he does not intend to move forward with those sections of the bill that are offensive to us.

During question period this past week, I asked the minister specifically to make that commitment before we get to the point of a second reading vote. He chose at the time not to, but perhaps on reflection he will see his way clear to doing that. If not, I can tell you now, and I won't predict how every member of our caucus will vote, that I will vote against the bill even though it will be a vote in principle. But I think we have to send a strong message to the government that we simply cannot support the legislation as it is presented to us now.

I would like to take just a few minutes, however, and speak to some other sections of the bill that contain some very positive elements that we will certainly support. One of those is the section that removes the liability for road clearance initiatives. We know that in this province we have a serious problem with gridlock. It is always frustrating when we have traffic backed up, sometimes for kilometres, because of a single crash or because of, in some cases, a minor accident. But where there's property damage, especially where there's property damage, individuals are hesitant to move debris from the road, to move any of the cars or interfere with the scene, for fear of liability.

Section 134.1 of the act allows for "removing vehicles, cargo and debris from the highway in order to clear the way for traffic and avoid injury or damage to persons or property" and it extends protection for personal liability "to prescribed persons who are ordered by a police officer to remove or store a vehicle, cargo or debris for anything done in good faith in the performance or intended performance of a duty under that" circumstance. We will support that. It's an appropriate measure for the minister to bring forward.

The second aspect of this bill that goes into some more of the administrative measures is section 40 of the act, which will give the minister the authority to enter into reciprocal agreements with other provinces as well as all of the states within the United States. I think this is important. In other words, if an Ontario driver commits an offence in one of the other jurisdictions, we will be notified here in Ontario of that offence and the appropriate consequences will then be meted on that driver. I think that is important, because offences on a driver's licence are indicative of one's ability to drive, the care with which one drives and one's attitude toward driving. So I think the reciprocal measures that are provided here in this legislation are appropriate.

I want to raise an issue—and I raised this with the minister earlier—and that is subsection 34(1): "Subsection 104(2.1) of the act is repealed and the following substituted"—I'll read it into the record for the benefit of other members. The minister was uncertain about the interpretation of this, and I'm going to ask him to clarify this for all members, because my interpretation of it is that with this new section, it would be mandatory for all people who ride bicycles in the province of Ontario to wear helmets. The minister wasn't aware of it. His staff advised him that this only relates to motorcycles or power-assisted bicycles.

I'm going to read the section into the record now: "(2.1) Subject to subsection 103.1(2), no person shall ride on or operate a bicycle on a highway unless the person is wearing a bicycle helmet that complies with the regulations and the chinstrap of the helmet is securely fastened under the chin." That's what's contained in the legislation. My reading of this is that this is a change in regulation in the province of Ontario that, if passed, would make it mandatory for everyone riding a bicycle to wear a helmet.

I don't think that's such a bad thing to do, by the way. I actually thought that perhaps the government had become enlightened by including this. I was surprised that the minister didn't make reference to it when he introduced the bill, but when I found out that the minister wasn't aware that it was in here, it explained that. The minister has undertaken to get clarification. My preference would be that he leave it there and that he issue another press release to announce that, because I think it makes good sense. I had a submission from a number of health care workers who in fact encouraged us to take that initiative.

I want to just very quickly also make another recommendation to the minister around the consequences that he has announced with regard to impoundments for individuals who are driving while their licence is suspended. I support that idea. I have advocated that for some time and, again, I'm pleased to see that it is in the legislation.

1750

But what is missing here and what I would ask the minister to seriously consider when we come to committee is to apply that same consequence, that same penalty to people who drive while uninsured. Uninsured motorists are a serious problem in this province. They are putting other innocent people at risk every day in this province. They know if they're insured or not. To get on the road, to get behind the wheel and subject not only themselves but other innocent people to circumstances where there's perhaps serious property damage, more importantly, serious personal injury, and there isn't sufficient insurance to cover off those damages is unconscionable. I believe it's important, and we have an opportunity through this legislation to amend the legislation to deal with that issue.

I'm coming to the end of my remarks. I know that there perhaps is some more business for us to do here. I've just been handed a note from the whip and it says, "Frank, stop for a motion when you get a signal." Do I have the signal?

I'm always willing to co-operate. Having been a whip before, I know it's a tough job. The last thing you want, Speaker, as a whip is an uncooperative member of the Legislature.

Now I've been given the signal. I want to thank you, Speaker, for your attention. There have been times during the course of the past hour when you've been the only one listening, and I want to thank you. I want to thank the parliamentary assistant and the minister for responding to

our recommendations, hopefully, for amendments to this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I haven't been handed a note, so I haven't the slightest idea what's going on. The Chair recognizes the deputy House leader.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I seek unanimous consent to put forward two motions regarding private members' public business.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Ms. Smith has asked for unanimous consent to put forward two motions with regard to private members' public business. Do we agree? Agreed. Minister?

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I did not hear a "no."

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On a point of order, Speaker: I have no instructions at this point as far as a unanimous consent motion, and I did say no. It was clearly heard.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We're a little bit late for that, too. I'll take it under advisement that there was a "no," although, as I said, I'm sorry, I didn't hear it. There is not consent, obviously. Now I'll go back to the deputy House leader.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can I move for unanimous consent for a recess for five minutes?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Unanimous consent for a three-minute recess. Agreed? Okay. We will recess for three minutes.

The House recessed from 1754 to 1757.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you for making my day interesting. I'm going to presume at the outset that we have adjourned debate on Bill 126. Yes? Thank you.

Second reading debate adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The deputy House leader.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I seek unanimous consent to put forward two motions regarding private members' public business, one motion specifically in regard to Bill 111 and one motion in regard to Bills 37, 98, 111 and 124, and that no debate or amendment be allowed on the motions and that the vote shall be immediately put by the Speaker.

I move that the order for second reading of Bill 111—sorry.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I think we're reading the motion. Now, do we have unanimous consent to put forward? Agreed? Agreed.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that the order for second reading of Bill 111, An Act to proclaim Emancipation Day, may be called during orders of the day tomorrow morning. At that time, the Speaker shall put the question on motion for second reading of the bill forthwith, without debate or amendment, and upon

passage of the second reading stage, the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called on that same day.

I move that—sorry, Mr. Speaker, do we deal with one at a time?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Yes.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: That's the first motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is the House familiar with the motion? Agreed? Agreed.

This is new territory. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Now we can continue, Minister.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that the order of the House referring Bill 37, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act to protect Ontario's children, to the Standing Committee on Social Policy be discharged; and

That the order of the House referring Bill 98, An Act to promote the sale of Ontario grown agricultural food products by amending the Municipal Act, 2001 and the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act, to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy be discharged; and

That the order of the House referring Bill 124, An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act with respect to cigarillos, to the Standing Committee on Government Committee be discharged; and

That Bills 37, 98 and 124 be referred instead to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, which committee is authorized to meet in the morning of Thursday, December 4, 2008, for the purpose of conducting clause-by-clause consideration of the bills; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to the bills with the clerk of the committee shall be 9 a.m. on December 4, 2008. At that time, those amendments to any of the bills which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of each of the bills in succession and any amendments thereto. The committee shall be authorized to meet until completion of clause-by-clause consideration of Bills 37, 98 and 124. No deferral of any division shall be permitted and no waiting period pursuant to standing 129(a) shall be allowed; and

That the committee shall report the bills to the House no later than the routine proceeding "Reports by committees" on December 4, 2008. In the event that the committee fails to report the bills on that day, the bills shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That, upon adoption by the House of the reports of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly on Bills 37, 98 and 124, the bills shall be ordered for third

reading, which orders may be called on that same day; and

That during afternoon orders of the day on Thursday, December 4, the time remaining until 6 p.m. be divided into four segments for consideration of the motions for third reading of the following four bills in the following order: 37, 98, 111 and 124; and

That during the consideration of the motions for third reading of each of Bills 37, 98, 111 and 124, the time allotted to each segment shall be shared equally among the three parties; and

At the end of each segment, the Speaker shall put the question for each respective bill without further debate or amendment; and

That in the case of any recorded division, the bell be limited to five minutes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is the House familiar with the motion? Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you to all.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer given by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care concerning hospital deficits, and pursuant to standing order 38, the question that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made. The member for Parry Sound-Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: Last week in the House during oral questions, I asked the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care a specific question about his plan for Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare. They expected a projected deficit to double by the end of the year. The minister, like many of the answers we get from government ministers, blamed past governments and rattled on about the good work being done by the local health integration networks, but he did not address the question.

The situation is serious. Under Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare's current agreement with the local health integration network, it is supposed to present a \$1-million deficit budget this year and a balanced budget for 2009-10. Guy Burry, the resources and accountability committee chair and board member, describes the situation as "not a good story."

Hospital "board chair Mike Provan says he's frustrated by the continual budget despair at the organization, and by the fact that it continues despite what he says are numerous steps taken in recent years to correct the financial situation."

In our local newspaper he's quoted as saying, "We're not hopeless but we're frustrated because we've been in existence for about four years and every year it seems we have another million-dollar deficit."

He goes on: "We've looked at a number of areas (in the organization), we've had consultants' reports and we've done most of what they've said to do (to find efficiencies) and in other areas they're saying we're the best (at financial efficiencies)"

When asked if Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare was going to be able to reach its \$1-million deficit goal for this year, Provan replied, "I don't know."

Mr. Provan went on to explain that the hospitals do not get more money when they do more work. The Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare organization is given a global budget which is increased every year by a certain percentage, but which is not adjusted to reflect more traffic through the hospital doors.

Provan explains:

"Because most of it's on a fixed budget, the more operations we do don't necessarily mean we get more money. Sure, the surgeon gets paid but that's a whole different issue.

"The hospital doesn't get paid (for supplies and equipment costs)."

As we know, in Parry Sound-Muskoka, health demands go up dramatically in the summer months.

According to CEO Barry Lockhart, the global funding amount from the province accounts for 75% of their revenue. That funding is increased by a certain percentage point every year, which is supposed to cover off any expenditure increases. Last year, they received a 2.8% increase, but their costs went up over 4%. This year, the LHIN which approves Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare's budget received \$1.3 million for population growth. That money was split between Barrie and Collingwood, the two areas within the LHIN that saw the most growth.

One of the biggest problems at Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare is with alternate-level-of-care patients, people who should be in long-term-care homes or receiving care at home, but who are taking up hospital beds due to lack of space or services in other areas. They run 138 beds, total, in their system, and today there are 50 alternate-level-of-care patients in those beds, so that equates to about 40% of the beds being occupied by individuals who could be cared for elsewhere. Most of the ALC patients in Muskoka are those who should be in a long-term-care home. Barry Lockhart advises that according to the provincial formula of 100 long-term-care beds per 1,000 people over the age of 65, Muskoka has enough beds, but that as a retirement destination, perhaps our formula should be different.

Although both Huntsville District Memorial Hospital and South Muskoka Memorial Hospital in Bracebridge are designed to run at about 85% occupancy, they've been hitting the 100% mark this year. The board must consider the real possibility of service cuts, and they're going to be holding meetings to try to deal with that point.

Mr. Lockhart goes on: "I think we can do some things and still maintain a rather excellent health care service. The concern we have now is, how far down the road do we have to keep going before some of our issues that are driving our costs have to be resolved?"

So I say again, other than service cuts, what is your plan, Minister, to deal with these hospital deficits that are growing from year to year?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Scarborough—Rouge River, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, you have up to five minutes.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: In response to the concern of the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka, I have to say that the health care sector is going to continue to rise as a dominant employer in Ontario for years to come. Our population continues to age, and demands on our health care system will increase, and patient care will remain our top focus. That means we're going to hire more nurses; that means we're going to hire more doctors. We'll need them in our hospitals; we'll need them in our long-term-care homes; we'll need them throughout our communities, as we increase access to care outside our hospitals.

However, these are long-term goals of the government. In the current fiscal climate, we all need to work with the resources that we have. We are asking our partners—the unions, the hospitals, patients, and all our colleagues in this Legislature—to work with us through these challenging times, as we work to protect public services in the midst of a difficult economy.

Our government made a tough choice to take a deficit to protect health care, after working so hard to eliminate the \$5.5-billion deficit left behind by the previous government. However, we will continue to invest more in our hospitals and the health care sector overall, just as we have every single year that we have been in office. What we are seeing is an improvement and proper alignment of services to make sure that hospitals are focusing on acute care and that the community-based supports are in place to support patients closer to home.

In 2003, we embarked on a plan of unprecedented investments to build a more sustainable health care system in Ontario. Health care spending has increased 37%, the highest level it has ever been.

With regard to Muskoka health care, I would like to say to this House that our investments in Muskoka

Algonquin Healthcare include a more than \$6.9-million increase in base funding since 2003-04. That would account for an 18% increase. We've invested over \$23 million in the North Simcoe Muskoka LHIN toward a three-year local aging at home strategy. Nineteen nurses have been added to Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare as part of our nursing graduate program. We've invested \$100,000 for 150 more cataract surgeries at this hospital, part of the \$515,900 in funding that Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare has received to reduce wait times.

The government has reached its goal of creating 150 family health care teams across the province to expand access to comprehensive primary care for all Ontarians. Six of these FHTs are in the North Simcoe Muskoka LHIN. As part of our ER and ALC strategy, we've also invested \$844,470 in the local LHIN to provide community alternatives to hospital care.

The member has raised this issue in the House before and I would like to add to it. We are working with our partners in health care to ensure that Ontario's health care system is and remains responsive and continues to meet patient needs.

A review was undertaken in 2007 by an independent outside consulting firm to assess the service delivery model initiated in a pilot project in 1997 as part of our lab restructuring initiative in this area. Upon consultation and review, the ministry and Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare hospital together determined that the best alternative to maintain local service was to accept the review's recommendations to adopt the same model of community lab services used across Ontario. The ministry is working closely with the community lab provider, the Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare hospital, and the North Simcoe Muskoka LHIN in the transition planning process to ensure that all residents of the pilot communities of Bracebridge, Huntsville and Burks Falls continue to have timely access to lab services in their communities.

I believe that the response from the minister and the one that I've provided today provide the member with clarity on his question.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House is adjourned until Thursday, December 4 at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1813.

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Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle
Kim Craiton, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Michael Prue, Tony Ruprecht
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Khalil Ramal, Laurie Scott
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Select Committee on Elections / Comité spécial des élections

Chair / Président: Greg Sorbara
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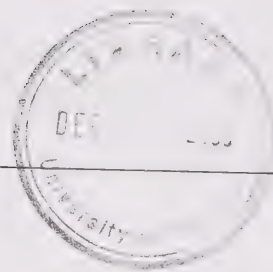
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First Session, 39th Parliament

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Thursday 4 December 2008

Jeudi 4 décembre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 4 December 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 4 décembre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EMANCIPATION DAY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LE JOUR DE L'ÉMANCIPATION

Mr. Arnott moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 111, An Act to proclaim Emancipation Day / *Projet de loi 111, Loi proclamant le Jour de l'émancipation.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated December 3, 2008, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Arnott has moved second reading of Bill 111, An Act to proclaim Emancipation Day. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated December 3, this bill is ordered for third reading.

ROAD SAFETY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ ROUTIÈRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 3, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 126, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and to make consequential amendments to two amending acts / *Projet de loi 126, Loi modifiant le Code de la route et apportant des modifications corrélatives à deux lois modificatives.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Certainly I have to say that I have mixed feelings about this debate, in the sense that it's one of those where you're kind of glad and kind of sad at the same time. There are things in this bill that I think deal with driver safety from a perspective of recognizing we need to do all that we can first as drivers, in taking our responsibilities as drivers and as legislators, to make sure that our highways are safe. But what makes me sad is the politics that I think are happening within this bill, that it's targeted to young people.

First of all I start with the premise, as do, I think, all other members in this House, that young people are equal citizens under the law. If a child 16 years and under, or a young adult 16 years of age and over, basically breaks the laws—they have to follow the laws just like anybody else. They have a responsibility to be good citizens. So when we look at the Legislature and the House of Commons, where we develop laws, we should be saying to ourselves that we treat everybody equally when it comes to the law. Clearly, what I think is happening in this bill is that we have a standard for younger people that is different from the standard for older people. I want to go through that and talk about why I think some of the provisions of this bill need to be changed in recognition of that fact. Let's talk about those parts of the bill in the order that they appear.

The first part of the bill deals with the issue of the alcohol level that should be allowed in your blood to be within the legal limit to drive. Currently, in the province of Ontario, .08 is the number. Anybody who is found with a blood-alcohol level of over .08 will be prosecuted under the law. I think that makes sense. We came to that conclusion some years ago, and we are very aggressive in this province in having RIDE programs and instructing our police to make sure they enforce that law to the best of their ability. We also do a lot to educate the public to let them know they have a responsibility to make sure they are not driving over the blood-alcohol limit of .08.

If you take a look at the statistics across this province, we're doing a pretty good job. Ontario has managed to put itself in a fairly good position of being fairly serious and having good deterrents and good education campaigns to get people not to get behind the wheel when they're drinking. Unfortunately, at times, people do. But if you take a look at the stats today and compare them to what they were 20 years ago, Ontario has made great, great progress in making our highways safer by very much reducing the number of incidents where people are driving under the influence over .08.

But here is the rub: The government is proposing in this law that we go to .0 for people under the age of 21. This raises two parts to the debate. The first part is, should we be lowering the .08 limit? Should it be .05, as some would argue, or should it be zero? My argument is that that's a good debate. What the legal limit should be is a debate that I think everybody is prepared to get into in this Legislature and in this province, because there are arguments on both sides as to .0 or .05. I don't think there's a lot of opposition to reducing the alcohol limit

that is allowed in a person's blood before that person is convicted of a drunk driving offence.

But the issue here is that we're saying we're only going to apply the .0 to kids—well, to adults; they're not kids at that point—under the age of 21. They can serve their country at the age of 17; they can pick up arms and defend us in places like Afghanistan. Certainly, we're not calling these people kids, we're calling them adults, because we're giving them responsibilities that quite frankly most of us would not want to do at age 50 or 51.

I come from the premise that if you can have somebody join the military at age 17, as I did, and basically pick up training and be shipped out with your unit to someplace around the world to either be on a peace-keeping mission or do the operational activities that are happening in Afghanistan, clearly these young people are not children. They're young adults, and they should be treated like any other adult in this country. So I have great difficulty with the portion of the bill that says we're only going to apply it to younger people when it comes to the blood-alcohol level.

I think that young people, myself as a middle-aged person and older people—or people older than me, I should say—are prepared to get into a debate about, should we be lowering the blood-alcohol limit for all drivers? I don't think it would be much of a problem for us to go from .08 to at least .05. Certainly, Mothers Against Drunk Driving has been lobbying and coming to Queen's Park, meeting with opposition members and government members for months and years, to lower it from .08 to .05.

I think probably that is a debate we can all buy in to. There are really good reasons we should go to .05. Some people would argue, go to .0. Well, as has been pointed out, .0 could be problematic from the perspective that if you're taking a cough medicine—some of the liquid ones you can take—you're going to be blowing over .0 and you're not even taking alcohol, so you could technically be charged for driving under the influence because you have a cold and you're taking medication. Clearly, there are some practical reasons why you cannot get to .0.

Two points: One, if it's impractical to get to .0 for all citizens because of that issue, then why are we applying that standard to drivers under the age of 21? Do they not get colds too? Do they not at times have to take cough medicine that would allow them to blow over .0? Are we saying that somehow people under the age of 21 never get colds? Are we saying that they're immune to cough syrup? It's kind of a wonky situation we're putting ourselves in.

0910

But the bigger issue is, why are we allowing, quite frankly, two classes of citizens within the province of Ontario? I know there are people out there who have an appetite for saying, "Well, they're not grown-up enough yet. They don't have enough experience. They have to earn their stripes." You hear all kinds of people talking about those things, but I hearken back to the day when I was 17. On my 17th birthday, I joined the military. I

decided I wanted to serve my country. Was I not a proper citizen at that point? Was I not an adult making an informed decision? Was I not entitled to rights under the Constitution or the laws of Ontario or Canada like any other citizen? I would argue that I was a citizen. So I have great difficulty with applying this only to people under the age of 21.

We already have, within our graduated driver system, prohibitions that probably go as far as they need to when it comes to allowing drivers to gain experience before they get their full licence. The graduated driver system has served us well in this province, and there are already restrictions about driving after midnight and other provisions within it that maybe make some sense when it comes to allowing drivers to get experience. But I want to say clearly on the record, as a New Democrat and as an individual, that I have great difficulty with having a law that applies just to young people and doesn't apply to the rest of our society.

I want to put on the record, yes, lower the blood-alcohol limit in the bill—provisions of the bill are a good thing. Yes, we should enter into that debate; we should be talking to people about what that should be. Should it be .05%? Should it be .0%? As I said earlier, I would argue that .0% is a problem. But it should be for all Ontarians. All citizens of this province who want to have a driver's licence should have the ability to be seen equally under that law. To segregate young people under the age of 21 to a different standard I don't think is fair. I think it's a bit of playing politics with this bill.

The other section of the bill deals with zero tolerance when it comes to speed. The government is saying they want a provision in the bill that if a person under the age of 21 gets caught speeding, in any way, shape or form, they would lose their licence as a result of that infraction. Again, I understand why the government is bringing this forward. There have been incidents that are quite sad, where people—not just young people, I would argue—have used excessive speed and, as a result of that excessive speed, have caused accident deaths.

We certainly know the incident that sparked this legislation, in regard to the tragedy of the young people who were killed as a result of driving their father's car faster than they should have and, as a result, were involved in an automobile accident that took their lives along with that of the passenger who was in the car. That is tragic; we can't underplay that. But there are already laws in this province that give police officers the tools they need to deal with dangerous drivers. I think that's the point I'm trying to make here. There are laws, for example, against street racing and against unsafe driving, and a police officer who pulls somebody over because of excessive speed already has many tools within the police officer's toolbox, as they would call it, to be able to withdraw a person's licence if they think that person is not a responsible driver.

So first of all I ask, why are we putting this in? What police officers are telling me—I have talked to police officers from Kitchener to Toronto to Timmins to, I

believe, Kingston as well—is that they're not likely to ticket somebody who is under the age of 21 for speeding if they know that young person will lose their driver's licence—if the person is doing 30 kilometres over, probably; if they're doing something dangerous, more than likely. But the point is, they already have the tools to do that. So I wonder how practical this is.

Certainly, there needs to be some sort of deterrent to make sure a very strong message is sent to all drivers—and maybe particularly to younger drivers—that says speeding will not be tolerated on our highways. You can do that in a number of ways. I remember being part of a government that dealt with photo radar. At that time, we instituted photo radar on the 400-series highways as a deterrent against people speeding, and it actually worked. People didn't like it politically. I understand that; it was one of the reasons we were defeated as a government in 1995.

I think it's more complex than that, but that was an issue for commuters. A lot of commuters didn't like the idea of having to drive within the speed limit. But I'll tell you, if you look at the stats on 400-series highways at the time photo radar was on, we had far fewer accidents, and traffic flowed much more easily because people were not constantly jamming on their brakes because of somebody cutting in front of them on the Highway 400 series somewhere or all of a sudden driving up behind somebody and having to press the brakes.

My point is, if we're trying to get at the issue of speed, I think there are far better ways for us to reduce speed overall on our freeways. Saying again that we're going to have a law that says, "If you're a young driver, here's the standard about speeding, and if you're an older driver, we have a different standard"—I'm not sure that gets at the overall issue of speeding.

I think it's discriminatory to a certain extent. I will argue, and I will give the government some acknowledgement on this, that maybe there need to be, inside the graduated driver's licence system that we have now, steps that people need to go through when it comes to experience and different things when it comes to being able to get a full licence. I don't have a problem with that, but what I'm saying is, if we're trying to get to the issue of how to prevent speeding on our highways, because we know that speed kills, then I think we need to approach it from a more global perspective.

Do we say to police officers that have to be more stringent or—I'm trying to find the word—tough when it comes to making sure we don't allow people to speed? How many of us have driven down the highways, and the police officer said, "Well, this is just a warning; keep on driving." Do we say to our police officers that we should have less tolerance when it comes to speeding?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: It never happened to Paul.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, it never happened to any of us, of course, but do we say that? Do we look at the issue of photo radar? Do we say that maybe we have to have a debate about reinstituting it? Again, it's politically not

popular, but it deals with the issue of speed, so I would say that.

The other big issue is that of training. We need to make sure that we properly train current drivers. There should be a fairly good public education campaign for all drivers, as we've done with drunken driving, to get people to understand that speeding leads to accidents and it's not a very good idea, and we need to take responsibility. I think there are different ways to get at that.

So we get to the next part of the bill, which is the issue of having one passenger in the car. This is the one that has garnered more attention than a whole bunch of bills that have gone through this place, other than the granny issue that my good friend Mr. Miller has raised in this Legislature over and over again. But the issue of saying to young people that if you're a younger driver you will only be allowed one passenger in the car, well, that has enraged young people beyond the pale. There are Facebook sites and Flickr sites and others that have started up where we've seen, by leaps and bounds, people engaging in debate on the Internet about why this is not a good idea and what their thoughts are about how this should change.

There has also been quite a debate within this Legislature, with members of all sides looking at this issue and saying, "Well, is this really a good idea?" And clearly there is a debate within police enforcement and others that are also asking the same kind of questions, both pro and con. Some people believe it's a good idea and some people don't believe it's a good idea. We need to enter into this when the bill goes into committee hearings, really listening to what people have to say so we make the proper decision.

Let's look at it first from the perspective of the young people. This, to me, is way beyond the pale. Let's look at the situation. You live in Hamilton and you're 18 years old. You're going off to the hockey game because you've got a game in St. Catharines. You and your buddies are off to go play hockey. All right. So now, as normally would be the case, you grab mom or dad's minivan, you load the equipment in the back of the minivan, and three or four of you go down to the hockey game. That's kind of the way it happens. We're saying to somebody who's 18 years old, who can serve the military, who can serve their country; they can drive a Hummer down the streets of Kandahar—

Mr. Paul Miller: Baghdad.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Not Baghdad—thank God we're not there—but of Kandahar.

They can be trusted with the lives of their co-soldiers, and they can be entrusted to follow the mission of Canada in Afghanistan, but we're not going to let them put more than one person in the car? They can put a whole bunch of soldiers with guns in the Hummer, they can drive the APC, they can fly the helicopter, they can do all those things, but we're saying, "If you're going to a hockey game in Ontario, you can't put more than one person in the car or the minivan." Give me a break. It is so, so, silly.

0920

Mr. Michael A. Brown: You're incorrect.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: He says we're making it up. We're not making this up; it's in the legislation. I listened very intently to the government when they had their say, and I would just ask them to listen me. I'm saying this is silly.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: But you're wrong.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, get up and debate. Tell me you're right. When it's your turn, you can do that.

My point is, this is silly. If we're saying to young people, "We think that for some reason you're distracted in your car or your minivan when there's more than one passenger," then I think we have a training problem. Let's get back and deal with the issue of how we train drivers. To argue that somehow or other a young Paul Miller, who was 18 years old back in the past, and going off to a hockey game down in St. Catharines, and he's got his three buddies in the back of the minivan with their hockey equipment, is going to be more distracted than a 50-year-old going to an Argos game with his buddies from Timmins—give me a break. I'm probably more distracted than he is. It's a longer drive, and my buddies take their football pretty darned seriously.

I just say come on, give me a break. Are we saying seriously that at the end of the day we're going to apply a double standard to young people on the basis that somehow or other they're going to be very much more distracted by having more people in a car? The issue is that drivers have to take the responsibility and that passengers also have a responsibility. That's really, to me, the key of the issue.

The other example is—I'm a private pilot, as everybody knows.

Mr. Paul Miller: And a good one.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And pretty a good one. I manage to keep the airplane straight and level—

Mr. Paul Miller: Have you crashed ever?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I haven't. You know, crash landing is a different state. Any landing is a form of crashing. It is a question of bouncing it once or twice and away you go.

Hon. James J. Bradley: You haven't crashed.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: But, no. I'm just having fun with my friend Mr. Miller.

But my point is, a young person in Ontario today, at age 15, can go out and do all their flight training. You can actually go out if you are 15 years old, you can do your ground school, you can write your exam, you can do all your flight training at age 15 and you can do your solo at age 15. But when you get to 16 years old, you get to the point of being able to do your flight test. On your 16th birthday, you can go out and get your flight test in order to have your licence to fly a private aircraft.

Then, once you have that licence, I could put, depending on the plane—I've got a four-seater, so I could put three passengers in my plane if I were 16 years old. If your dad's got a Caravan, you can probably put eight in the back—it's a plane, it's called a Cessna Caravan, and you can put eight people into that aircraft.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Did you have a Caravan? My God, that's a great aircraft. I wish I had that. Boy, you have more money than me.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, you didn't have?

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller: He rented it.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You rented a Caravan. OK, there you go.

But my point is that the 16-year-old pilot can get into the airplane and is able to fly more people in that airplane than he or she will be allowed to drive in a car.

Now, the argument that I heard from across the aisle was, "Oh, well, it's not like a whole bunch of highways." Listen, piloting an airplane is much more complex and much more difficult than driving a car. There are all kinds of things that you have—

Mr. Bruce Crozier: It is not.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: He's saying it's not. Well, give me a break. You have to understand the situation that are you in. You need to understand traffic patterns. You've got to know the air rules, navigation, meteorology, and you have to know airmanship. There's a lot more to flying an aircraft—I think everybody will agree with me on that—than driving a car.

The issue here is that we train pilots to be safe pilots. We train pilots in this country to make sure that they understand what good piloting skills are all about. We make sure that they understand the situational awareness that they're in. We make sure that they understand air traffic laws so that they know what the separation of air space should be in different circumstances—class D, class G, or whatever it might be. We do that for a reason, because we need to make sure that our airways are safe.

Now, here's the rub. How many airplane accidents do you have in Canada? I would say we have some. But when you look at the stats, is it young pilots at age 16 who are having all the crashes? No. It's a mix of all kinds of different people. There are older pilots, younger pilots, who are getting into accidents for different reasons: sometimes bad piloting skills, sometimes bad choices, flying into bad weather etc. The stats do not bear out with private pilots that younger pilots have a disproportionate number of accidents to older pilots. So my point is this: If we're saying there is a disproportionate number of accidents with younger drivers, and the stats would indicate that there is, then maybe the issue is training. Why are we not, then, having a discussion in this Legislature about making sure that we have a better driver training system in the province of Ontario that allows us to really try to get at the issues of how we're able to train drivers at a young age to be the responsible drivers that they are and, once they get their licence through a graduated driver's licence system, that they basically ramp up to an ability to drive a car safely on our highways? I'm saying maybe we've got a training issue here. Maybe the emphasis should be put on a couple of things.

One, we should be making sure that in high schools—because that is where people turn the age of 16—there is driver training for anybody who wants to go out and get their licence; that we as a province engage, through the Ministry of Education, the funding for that so that it becomes an opportunity for all. You know as well as I do there are many young people out there, at age 16, who don't have the means to pay for driver training and don't have a car to drive in. But we know eventually they will have a car and they will become drivers, so why don't we have a driver training program that basically allows all young citizens at age 16 who choose so to go out and do the training to become a driver? Then, once they do get their licence and they do buy a car, they've got to go through the graduated driver's licence system. It seems to me that's the emphasis we should be putting on in the debate, and saying that the issue is that of training and making sure that we do a better job.

On the other side, let's say a person decides for whatever reason at 16 that they don't want a licence and at age 25—and I've seen a lot of this, where people at age 25 or 30 decide, "Okay, it's time for me to get a driver's licence"—they have to follow the same standard. Just because you're 25 years old or you're 16 years old and you've never driven before, that doesn't mean to say that you're smarter at getting your driver's licence. I would argue that at 16 you're probably much more nimble than an older person, much more able to process things more quickly. There's probably an argument that it's easier for a 16-year-old than, let's say, a 40-year-old to go out and get a driver's licence or to acquire skills, the testing, etc. because you're younger, you're more of a sponge when it comes to learning and your reflexes are better etc. My point, however, is, shouldn't the standard be applied to all, so that the person at age 35 or 40 who says for the first time, "I want a drivers licence," has to undergo the same type of training as any new driver, and basically that it's mandatory: "Here's what you need to do?"

We do that to an extent in Ontario. In fairness to the government, I'm not saying that that doesn't happen whatsoever. But clearly the stats spell out that there is, from what the stats are showing, a disproportionate number of accidents with younger drivers. Therefore, let's come at it from the opposite direction. Let's look at it from the training perspective.

Now, the other issue is that of driver responsibility. I think this is one area where we really need to change the attitude of citizens completely. That is, the first thing that we have to say is that driving is not a right; it's a responsibility. I've spoken to this issue before in the House in the past. It seems to me that there are far too many people in our society, young people included, who say, "It's my right to get my driver's licence. That's what happens. When I get to 16, it's my right to get it. That's something that society owes me." Well, I'm sorry. It's something that society doesn't owe you; it's a privilege that we give you. With that new privilege of being able to drive a car comes a responsibility to make sure that you're safe for yourself and your passengers and the

motoring public that you're engaged with as you're driving down our streets and highways in this province.

Maybe one of the things we need to do, both through driver training and also just through public education overall, is to make sure that people understand that when they get behind the wheel of a car, that car can become a lethal weapon and you need to make sure that you drive that car safely. For example, we have legislation in this House now that will look at banning cellphones and other devices in cars. I think that's a great idea. We're saying to people, "Listen, you can't be abusing your privilege of driving a car and trying to talk to somebody on the phone at the same time and being distracted from what you're supposed to be doing, which is driving the car." So, certainly there are ways of being able to strengthen the individual responsibility that we all have to take when it comes to driving an automobile. I say to the government, we really need to take a look at the issue of how we're able to engage citizens in recognizing that they have a responsibility when it comes to driving a car, and that they need to take that responsibility seriously. So I say to the government, okay, we know why are you doing this. There might be an argument as to, "We need to find a way to make sure that we don't have a disproportionate number of accidents with younger people versus older people," but clearly, I think if we really get into it and look at the stats more deeply, there's probably an equal amount of accidents with much older people. We know that when people—it's the natural aging process that our reflexes are not as good as they used to be and our eyesight might not be as good as it used to be. I would argue that we have a problem at both ends of the scale: older drivers and younger drivers. So it seems to me that we need to look at this from a larger perspective, not just from the perspective of younger people, of making sure that all drivers have the skills that they need to drive a car and that they are exercising their responsibilities correctly in driving. So I think the problem I have with this bill is we're only looking at young people, it's like we're picking on young people.

0930

It has been interesting. The government has been raising in this debate that one of their stats that proves this is the information that the insurance companies collect on drivers. Clearly, young people are paying much higher automobile insurance than older people. They say the way of being able to fix that is to have this legislation, because if we make the stats safer, at the end of the day it'll drop the insurance rate for younger people. I say, hogwash. The issue to deal with that is public auto insurance. If you want to get into providing a better and fairer insurance system to the—

Hon. James J. Bradley: I thought we had that.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, we don't have that.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: A more expensive system.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, here go the Conservatives—I mean the Liberals—across the way, all right? No, they're Tories too—that's what I'm saying—on this one. Oh yes, the cat's out of the bag.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: There go the Conservatives again: the Liberal benches. There I hear the Conservative voices amongst the Liberals. I hear them. I just said—I'm going to do it again—"public auto insurance." He didn't rise to the bait this time.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I just thought we had it.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I know my good friend Mr. Bradley is a lefty like me and he likes the idea of public auto. I do know that. He's a social democrat at heart. I do know that. Although wearing Liberal clothing, I know Mr. Bradley is a social democrat. I give him some credit.

So here's the issue. The Conservative members on the Liberal side of the House are really worried about getting into a discussion about why it is that we're charging young people an exorbitant amount of money for insurance.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: There goes another Conservative voice across the House. They're all Tories on this side this morning. The Liberal caucus is now putting on their blue jackets again and they're getting into the Conservative mantra.

Mr. Paul Miller: Blue shirt.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Blue shirt, the whole bit. I've got a white one, thanks. Sometimes I wear blue shirts. Well, I do have a bit of a blue tie.

Let me make the point. I heard the parliamentary assistant and others say that we need to basically lower auto insurance for young people, and one of the ways of doing that is by way of this legislation, because it'll make the stats improve, young people will become safer, there will be fewer accidents, and the private insurance system is going to be able to deal with providing cheaper insurance to young people. I'm saying no, the way you do that is through a driver-owned system. We have this system in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and BC, and we have a mixed system, both public—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: There go the Conservatives again. They're saying they pay more insurance than us. Man, oh, man, go take a look at the websites. I can't get over it: Liars figure and figures lie all the time.

Interjection: Oh.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It is parliamentary, what I said.

My point is this: If we're serious about providing all drivers with a cheaper form of insurance, the issue is to pool the risk of accidents into a larger pool. That's what driver-owned auto insurance does. You still have brokers; your brokers locally would still have to sell you insurance. The difference is that they would be selling a product that is a pooled product through a public plan, the idea being that when you pool everybody into one larger pool and you make it mandatory that everybody is insured—and one of the big problems we have now is many people can't afford insurance, so they're driving without insurance on our highways, and we know that's a huge issue, because when we get into an accident with somebody like that, it becomes very expensive as far as

what the settlements are going to be. First of all these people are not pooled and paying insurance; they're not paying their part, and it's very risky for those people who actually get in an accident with somebody who's not insured. So the issue is, you make all drivers insured by virtue of their driver's licence and then you basically have after that a publicly pooled system that says, "Because everybody's in the pool, we now have a system of insurance that we're able to provide at a not-for-profit rate of insurance and coverage to all drivers in this province so that they're properly covered." You sell that through your private brokers.

I don't argue for a second that you get rid of the individual brokers. I think the brokers are doing a great job. I've always argued—in fact, my father-in-law was an insurance broker. That's what my father-in-law did until—

Hon. James J. Bradley: The cat's out of the bag now.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, no, my father-in-law owned his own private insurance company and sold automobile insurance. So I don't have a problem—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, he wasn't a pilot either. My dad was—

Mr. Paul Miller: Did you get a discount?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, actually, I did.

Hon. James J. Bradley: How much?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I can't remember. It was 25 years ago. Back then, we didn't pay much for insurance.

My point is that if we're really serious about providing auto insurance in this province at a lesser rate, we should take a look at entering into such a system. Again, I would argue that we do that in consultation with our brokers, because in the end, the brokers do a good job of providing a service to their clientele and they can continue doing so under a public plan, such as they've done in Manitoba and other places.

When the Manitoba system was set up, the public was in favour, but the brokers were opposed. It's interesting now, years after the Manitoba insurance plan was put in place, if you talk to the brokers there in the province of Manitoba, they're saying it's the best thing that ever happened. It's far less administrative for them to be able to sell. They don't have to go through the hoops that they've got to go through now with all the various insurance companies that we have today. They're making a reasonable return on the policies that they're selling because they're allowed to charge, as they do in the private system, a percentage markup to broker and to sell the insurance. The private brokers have actually quite liked it in Manitoba.

My point is that if the government is serious about getting into providing auto insurance for all people and especially young drivers, I think we should get into a discussion of driver auto. I think that's one of the ways that you're able to do that.

Back to the issue of the younger drivers: I just think the government is missing the point here in saying to young people that they're going to have to be limited to having one person in the car. There are all kinds of examples that have been used. I was listening to Mr.

Runciman, the other day in the House, raise the point that you can have a 19-year-old flying an Airbus somewhere over the Atlantic with 300 passengers in the back, as the co-pilot or as the captain, depending on the airline and how many pilots they've just hired, but when that pilot lands the airplane back in Toronto, at Pearson, and gets inside their car, they can't bring the crew with them. There are all kinds of examples of how this doesn't make any sense.

Again, the argument that young people who go to serve our country in Afghanistan can get into a Hummer and they can carry troops, they can drive anti-personnel carriers, they can fly helicopters, they can drive and fly all kinds of vehicles with multiple passengers on board in much, much more harrowing situations than driving down the QEW or the 401—yet we're saying to young drivers in this province that they can't do that.

This bill is going to get an opportunity to go to committee. Obviously, we're going to have an opportunity at committee to have a discussion about this. I want to implore, just before I finish, the following: (1) the government needs to listen to what people are telling us at committee; (2) there need to be fairly extensive public hearings on this issue.

I would argue that this bill is not one that should just have hearings here in Toronto. This bill needs to travel to different parts of the province of Ontario. Why? Because young people can't afford to come to Toronto to speak on this bill if they're living in Hamilton or Kenora or Kingston or Cornwall or wherever it might be. I'm not arguing that we should go to every municipality in Ontario, but I think we need to have a fair regional representation with where this committee goes so that people are able to come to us and make presentations. I think what we find will be instructive, because, yes, there are two sides to this story.

There are some good parts of this legislation that deal with dropping the blood-alcohol level. I think all of us can get into that debate, and I think most of us are on side with that particular provision. I think it's a question of extending it beyond just age 21. I think we can have a discussion about how we can have more deterrents within the legislation in order to deal with the speeding issues.

Do you want to split my lead?

Mr. Paul Miller: I get 20 minutes, right?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes. Do you want to split it? Okay, cool. I'm asking for unanimous consent to split the rest of my lead. If you get up there, I'll be finished in two seconds.

Hon. James J. Bradley: He's getting used to the front row now.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's right. He's moving up.

In public hearings, we also have to get into the issue of making sure that we listen not just to young people—and others about this provision of limiting people's ability to have passengers within their car.

With that, I look forward to the committee hearings.

0940

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: I rise today to talk about Bill 126. It's an important step on the road to safe transportation in our province. New Democrats support a significant portion of this bill but have raised a number of concerns in the House, particularly when it comes to the passenger restrictions for young drivers with a G2 licence.

First, I do want to clear some things up on Bill 126 for those watching at home.

At the same time as the government introduced the legislation, they introduced the regulations they intend to pass under the legislation. It has created a lot of confusion out there about what's actually in the bill. The passengers provisions, along with the extension of the minimum G1 and G2 learning periods and incremental licence suspensions for novice drivers, are all regulatory changes. All other changes, like tougher blood-alcohol limits, administrative driver's licence suspensions, laws that make it easier for police to impound vehicles, and increased fines for Highway Traffic Act infractions, are part of the actual bill. Many of these are specific measures that Mothers Against Drunk Driving have been fighting for for years.

For the most part, the New Democrats support the provisions in the actual bill. The alcohol limits, for example, were a long time coming and bring us up to speed with other provinces. In fact, we believe that the provinces and the federal government should examine zero blood-alcohol rules for all drivers, not just those under 21 years old. In many respects, this 21-year-old cut-off is artificial because alcohol impairs all of us.

It's the regulations we have some problems with. The proposed regulation would prevent drivers under age 19 and holding G2 licences for less than a year from carrying more than one passenger; the proposal will exempt family members. Currently, these drivers cannot drive between 12 a.m. and 5 a.m.; the regulation would extend the restriction for 24 hours. New Democrats believe that the regulation is too restrictive and penalizes parents and young people unnecessarily. The regulation prevents carpooling with friends to, as the member from Timmins pointed out, hockey, dances or music lessons. It places additional strains on busy working families trying to coordinate transportation. This is especially true in rural and northern communities, where public transit is hard to find, if available at all. But more to the point, the government has not demonstrated concretely that the regulation will prevent the death and injury of young drivers.

We know and acknowledge that young drivers disproportionately represent those killed and injured in drunk driving incidents. What we aren't convinced of, however, is whether extending the passenger restriction already in place between 5:01 a.m. and 11:59 p.m. will save lives. Here are some questions for the government and the Minister of Transportation that would allow legislators to address this fundamental question: When a young driver was travelling with other passengers and they were killed or injured on the road, how often did that happen between 5 a.m. and 11 p.m.? I would expect that the vast majority of these incidents occur at night,

which would mean restrictions are not necessary at those hours.

What percentage of incidents between 5 a.m. and 11 p.m. where a vehicle driven by a young driver with more than one passenger crashes, causing injury or death, involved alcohol, speeding or other violations under the Highway Traffic Act? In other words, given that the legislation requires a blood-alcohol content of zero and tightens up penalties on Highway Traffic Act violations, would the daytime restriction be adding anything? Would these drivers who are breaking the law care about breaking another law?

BC introduced a similar restriction in 2003. Is there any evidence to suggest that the rule, by itself, would make our roads safer?

The burden of proof here lies with the minister and the province. If he says the provision will save lives, he has to present evidence to this Legislature that proves that. Let me quote the *Toronto Star* on this very issue: "These new rules will have repercussions, even for teens who generally drive responsibly. The onus is on the government to demonstrate that they are both reasonable and necessary." November 19, 2008.

We agree and note that these debates and committee presentations will provide ample opportunity for the government to present their case. Statistics alone should not be the impetus for public policy decisions. For that reason, New Democrats will be voting against the bill in second reading. We want this bill to get to committee, so the public can weigh in formally. The committee should travel to communities across this province to get input. After all, the experience in downtown Toronto will be different than that in Windsor, Welland, Sudbury or Thunder Bay.

There's been a lot of public discussion about the number of people, young and old, who have signed on to Facebook to register their position on Bill 126. Given the low voter turnout in elections, it's good to see citizens—especially young people, who disproportionately don't vote—involved on this scale. That is healthy. The last time we checked, the Facebook site had 141,187 members and almost 14,000 messages posted on the virtual wall. No committee has ever experienced that many individual responses.

Allen Kempton, from Anderson Collegiate and Vocational Institute in Durham, writes: "Parts of this bill do make sense, and I see where they are coming from about it, but others just don't. Like, what is such a problem with having a grade 12 student give his friends a ride from school and school-related functions?" Dale Gold, from York University: "The part of the law I really don't agree with is the passengers thing. What if I'm out with friends, I have had no alcohol at all, but my friends have been drinking? They want to drive home, and I would want to say, 'I can give you all a ride.' But I can't because apparently that would be unsafe. Should I just let them get behind the wheel? I don't think so."

What would happen if I was up north with a friend and we were at a function, not drinking, and coming home I

have a medical problem—I may have a seizure. Is my friend not allowed to be in the car with me, or is he going to take over the wheel and drive? Are there going to be exemptions for emergencies? I don't know if we've even discussed that. What if I was out in a rural area and we hit a snowstorm? I am not allowed to have another person in the car for backup? It's no different than being on a plane and the pilot has a heart attack. Thank God we have a co-pilot or someone in the passenger section who can fly the plane, or we would be in big trouble.

Shayna Briere, from Kitchener: "I understand the speeding and the no-alcohol level thing. But why can't we have more than one friend?"

An editorial in the *Toronto Star* on November 24 said, "The Liberals did not campaign on these changes in the last election. Rather, they were lobbied to take these steps post-election, by a grieving father, among others. Given that, they should not be rushed through the Legislature."

We hope these voices are heard in committee. Let's not rush through it. New Democrats encourage parents and young people to come to the committee and make a presentation. This is a great opportunity to engage young people in our province in politics. We shouldn't waste this opportunity.

The proposed regulations under Bill 126 extend the length of the G1 and G2 periods. The length of a G1 will go from one year to one and a half years; for drivers registered in an approved driver education course, the length of the G1 will go from eight months to one year. The length of the G2 will go from one year to a year and a half. This is a measure New Democrats support.

We believe that more driver education and public awareness are key to lowering accident, impaired driving and dangerous driving rates in the long run, but we have some serious concerns about the quality of driver education programs in our province. While we support longer G1 and G2 periods so that novice drivers can absorb the education they are receiving, we're not convinced that driver education programs are adequate. We'd like to see more government involvement in driver education.

In last year's Auditor General's report, James McCarter found that 55% of first-time drivers enrolled in a program crashed their cars about 62% more often. In other words, there was a significantly higher collision rate for motorists who signed up for driver education programs compared to those who did not. That's a weird statistic. More worrying is the fact that this number was up 24% since 2000. So things aren't getting better on the roads; they're getting worse. Driver education will play a big role in lowering those numbers.

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The Ministry of Transportation did not have an explanation for this statistic. The Auditor General said the province didn't investigate the finding or take a critical look at its accredited driving schools. Here is what the Auditor General had to say at the time:

"They had done very little work at all to see why this is happening. Our question to ministry is, this is pretty

significant. Surely you should have investigated this and determined why this is happening so you could take an appropriate action."

The Auditor General then suggested there is evidence to suggest some driving schools are selling graduation certificates without requiring the training. Pretty scary thought: getting a certificate without really completing the course, or without even taking the course. That should be looked at for sure.

Two possible explanations are: systemically bad driver education courses, or some type of—I hate to say it—fraud; requesting more certificates than graduates. There's evidence of these types of fraudulent practices going on. Even after complaints were launched against some driving schools for allegedly sold driver education certificates, the Auditor General said the province didn't even threaten to revoke government accreditation.

Either explanation, bad courses or fraudulent players, points to a real problem with our driver education courses—not to mention the finding that driving instructors are also more likely than average Ontarians to accumulate demerit points. Interesting. People who are training our young drivers are losing points. According to the Auditor General, about 360 instructors, 6.5%, collected demerit points for speeding, not wearing their seat belts and disobeying traffic lights. Wow. So the trainers are probably worse than the people they're training in some cases. We hope the Auditor General follows up on this issue in next week's report.

Last April, the ministry brought forward a new curriculum for driver's ed. We call on the Ministry of Transportation to comprehensively examine whether the curriculum is working and whether they have tackled the fraud in the system.

Ontario should consider revamping its driver education program. We should look to other provinces for the lead. Manitoba teaches their driver's education in high school classrooms. Students and their families are charged \$50, with the public insurance system picking up the tab for the remainder of the cost, approximately \$300. That includes 34 hours of in-class instruction and 16 hours—eight hours of actual driving—of in-car experience. That's reasonable, affordable and fair.

In Manitoba, all drivers receive the same quality instruction, and given the fact that it's a public system, there's no possibility of fraud. And they're doing innovative things to involve parents in the education process. For example, parents have to fill out a log to demonstrate that the young driver has been on the road with a supervisor for a minimum of 24 hours.

On the other hand, in Ontario, young drivers and families pay upwards of \$1,000 to \$1,400 depending on the package. The \$1,000 package gets students 25 hours in class and 10 hours on the road, but it doesn't include night or snow driving. That costs more. There are countless fly-by-night operations that charge much less but don't provide good driver education.

In Ontario, more money gets Ontario drivers less instruction. It's time we re-evaluated our more-for-less

model of driver's ed. Maybe we should follow Manitoba's lead and put a publicly subsidized driver's ed program into our classrooms. You're learning all the things about life; you're learning all about history. Why not learn about how to drive a car in high school as well? It's a good place to start.

New Democrats also want to know what the impact of tougher legislation and regulation will be on a young and novice driver's insurance rates. On top of paying through the roof for driver's ed, drivers are paying unaffordable rates for insurance. With an average insurance bill of \$2,300, we pay 80% more than BC residents. While no average is available for young drivers, we know that it's upwards to \$4,000 compared to \$1,500 for a young driver in Manitoba. That means that unless parents come up with cash for unaffordable rates, young drivers aren't going to get the insurance they need. I've heard rumours that there might be up to 30% of people on our roads without car insurance—a pretty scary thought. I sure wouldn't want them to hit me because I might have trouble collecting.

What impact will the legislation and regulations have on insurance rates? We don't know for certain, but we are concerned that relatively minor Highway Traffic Act violations will hurt young drivers trying to get already-unaffordable insurance. It is possible that a novice driver receives a 30-day suspension for driving 10 kilometres above the speed limit, and would that drive up his insurance costs for these drivers? New Democrats want to make sure that relatively minor violations don't lead to unreasonable increases in insurance rates. We ask the Liberal government to respond to this issue and we call on those in the insurance industry to come forward in committee to guarantee that minor infractions won't lead to unreasonable increases in insurance costs.

There are obviously some concerns we have with this bill. I believe at the committee level the minister and his staff will take the input from our young drivers and our older drivers in this province because, I believe, they have some valuable information and I hope that they include representatives from the insurance industry because our kids pay horrendous amounts for insurance in this province, and it's not always the young drivers who get into accidents. There are a lot of older drivers who maybe should go back for retraining and maybe they should—how would I say it?—take a refresher course as soon as possible, because, I must say, I've run into some real dilemmas on the highway and it's not always the young drivers. Some of those kids are actually very responsible and very good drivers.

I can speak from a personal experience. I have three daughters, 27, 25 and 24, and I don't believe—I could be wrong, unless they've hidden it from me—they've had a ticket. I believe they're all responsible drivers. None of them drink when they drive. They're very responsible. They'll have a designated driver if they decide to go out to a pub or whatever the young people do, which I used to do. A lot of our kids understand the implication of driving and drinking and what it leads to, because, trust

me, a lot of them have seen friends of theirs killed in high school and in university and college because of alcohol, or because of an older driver hitting a carload of kids who haven't had a drop. That happens, too.

I'm hoping that the government, before they put this into law, takes a hard look at some of the concerns because, I'll be honest, I have been inundated with calls and e-mails from young people concerned about this bill and the way it's coming forward. I do believe that the transportation minister will take a good, hard look at it and I believe, as my colleague pointed out, that Mr. Bradley has a social conscience and he is a reasonable individual.

We don't want to punish the young people in the province; we want to work with them to make our roads safer and our public safer. I believe genuinely that 99% of the kids out there want to be part of that program; they don't want their rights taken away from them; they want to earn the respect of the elder population. I believe we have a lot of good kids out there who want to get better training. It's very sad when you see these incidents in the paper or funerals of young people who have sometimes innocently been killed by a drunk driver, an older drunk driver, or they themselves have been a little reckless. It's sad. I don't believe those things will never happen again. I'm not that naive, but I do believe we can cut down the numbers and cut down the percentages.

I want the insurance companies not to gouge the young drivers and not punish the entire population. I think that it should be dealt with on an individual case, not right across the board punishing every young driver. Why should my daughter or your son pay more for some irresponsible person out there who should not even be driving, yet they get punished too? It's just not right. I think Grey Power, the insurance company, should be made for young people, for "young power," as good drivers should be rewarded for their good records as well. I don't think that the present insurance system is correct.

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So in closing, I encourage the minister and the committee to work hard, because this is going to have a major impact on a lot of people in our province. I do believe that everybody in this House wants to do the right thing. I hope that we can work together to get this solved.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mario Sergio: I have listened to the submissions both by the member from Timmins-James Bay, I believe it is, and Hamilton East-Stoney Creek. I can appreciate their comments. However, if we didn't have the foresight of the Minister of Transportation in introducing this bill, we wouldn't be here discussing it today and looking forward to some changes to the Highway Traffic Act.

By no means are we looking at all the young people and young drivers as being bad drivers or being bad young people. The fact is that the percentage of young drivers 19, 20 and under involved in accidents is a very high number.

I have also heard from the two previous members with respect to the fact that maybe changes are needed or

required in the education system and stuff like that. That could very well be anything that would enhance the driving of our young people, but there is something that we cannot put in writing and cannot put into legislation, and that is experience. We can't expect that a young driver, a brand new young driver has the experience of the road, road conditions and others—the ability to spot problems as they see them on the road. Those are driving skills that you cannot have in a piece of legislation.

What is important, and I have to commend the Minister of Transportation for introducing the bill—hopefully this will be travelling. Indeed, we take this very seriously. I think both the Premier and the minister have said that this is a very important piece of legislation, that indeed we will be looking at receiving submissions and recommendations. Who knows, we may see good amendments coming out of that that will indeed improve the bill as it is.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I listened with interest to my friends from Timmins-James Bay and Hamilton East-Stoney Creek on the question of this bill, which I think even the government is prepared to admit has a number of holes in it at this point. I'm optimistic that, in committee and over time, we'll see some significant change.

I think what we have to look at are restrictions based on experience, not particularly on age. I happen to have a great deal of confidence in young people. I've had in my riding and, indeed, in my business life the opportunity to meet an awful lot of young people. Sure, there are bad apples, but for the most part the tree is in very, very good shape. We're bringing people along.

I listened as my friend from Timmins-James Bay talked about piloting. I share that avocation and have been trained. I've got to tell you, the first instructor that I ever had was a 20-year-old woman who had begun her training at 16. She certainly understood the idea of restraint and care, and I learned that from her. So there's something in this area that you can learn from young people.

As far as the kind of groundswell that you've seen, young people who organize themselves and express themselves—and even the Premier has acknowledged this—have used something that I've also had experience with since its inception, the Internet. I've got a technical background; I've been on the Internet for 20 years—other people, not so much. Having said that, when you look at 170,000 and growing who are saying to the minister, "You've got to take a look at this bill. You've got to take a look at the concept of restricting us and making us different and discriminating against us on the basis of age by, for example, not allowing the same number of persons in an automobile at the same time as anybody else"—I think that that, again, requires some review. So I urge the minister to consider this as we go forward and I look forward to the hearings on Bill 126.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I appreciate the comments from the member for Timmins–James Bay and the member for Hamilton East, and maybe I could assist them a little bit as we go forward with bringing forward the actual regulations and bill provisions.

First, with the blood alcohol, I would say, yes, zero is the standard that will be put forward in this bill. It will be similar to what happens in all American jurisdictions. Just for members' information, a spoonful of cough medicine or a little bit of rum cake will not affect this. It will be possible to do those sorts of things that one might do if you have a cold, or if you were at grandma's for Christmas dinner.

I also would like to point out to members that the restricted licence in G2, when we're relating that to the number of passengers in the car, would be in place for one year of your G2 licence. It would be similar to what happens right now between midnight and 5 a.m.

Why would a government consider doing this? Well, the government would consider doing this because statistics show that, when you get to more than one passenger in the vehicle under 19, there are twice as many accidents when there are three people in the car—the driver and two others. When there are four, it is triple the number of accidents that that car might be involved in. We think that's significant. We think that's something we might be able to do something about, and we're looking forward to talking about it in committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: We are being serenaded by the long-term-care workers outside. They're singing Solidarity Forever. This government, of course, has not lived up to their promises of the last election when they talked about further funding.

I would like to comment that the Minister of Transportation is in the House. We're not supposed to comment on whether people are absent from the House, but I think it's okay to comment when they're in the House. The Minister of Transportation is in the House so often during debate on a bill. If the minister who's carrying the bill is not in the House, I'm sure they're briefed on what goes on in the House. But today, the minister is sitting there and paying attention. I would say to the minister that I am philosophically opposed to any bill that targets one segment of our society. I can understand where the concept of this bill came from—I may not agree with it, but I understand the concept of it—and I would find it more palatable if we were to target the first three years of your driving experience: Whether you're a teenager, whether you're 40, or whether you're 60, the first time you get a licence, you have these restrictions placed on you. Then it's fair to all of society. But when you target someone who is a teenager for no other reason than the fact they're a teenager, I'm philosophically opposed to that. I think that's unfair. If you're 25 and you just got your driver's licence, and you may have a similar learning curve—in fact, your learning curve will probably be a little slower than it would be if you were a teenager,

because we know that during those teenage years from 14, 15, to 18, 19 or so you learn at a very rapid pace. I think the minister should consider making that as a change.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I let it go this time, but I just say to all honourable members that the standing orders don't allow us to refer to whether a member is in the House or not in the House.

The honourable member for Timmins–James Bay has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to thank members for the comments that they made; I listened intently to them. I don't agree with everything that's been said, but let me just take on a couple of things.

The parliamentary assistant says, "Well, when you look at the stats there are more accidents happening when there are more passengers in the car." This is basically the argument that he makes. When you take—

Mr. Michael A. Brown: No. Young drivers.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, this is the point I'm making. First of all, I think that's true not just for young drivers. I think that's true overall. If there is a distraction in the car, certainly there can be an accident, and that is as likely to happen to a 30-year-old as an 18-year-old. So I just say, be careful with the stats, because I've been listening to some of the people who have been speaking, who have far more knowledge on this than we do, and there is a discrepancy within the data that you're talking about.

The bigger issue here is, are we all in agreement that we need to find ways to make our highways safer? The answer is yes. Are there provisions in the bill that are a step in the right direction? I think, clearly, the blood alcohol one is one of those. But the real issue, to me, is twofold. It's that this is a highly discriminatory bill. We're going to treat younger people as a different class of citizens. I think that's the issue that really bothers me. If we want to make our roads safer, then let's have some standards and training that will apply to all drivers so that we make the roads as safe as possible for all passengers and drivers on the highways and streets across this province. But to just point the finger at younger drivers, I think, is highly unfair. As I pointed out earlier, a young person, at 17, can serve their country, and we think that's a great standard and we're proud that they do so, but we're saying they are lesser citizens when it comes to their ability to drive a car. So I just think we should really be treading very carefully down this road.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you very much. It being just about 10:15 a.m., this House stands in recess until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1011 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of page Sarah Danchuk, we would like to welcome her mother, Carol Danchuk, and her father, Nick Danchuk, to the public galleries this morning.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We'd just like to congratulate the honourable member from Oxford, Ernie Hardeman, on his birthday today. Happy birthday, Ernie.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Health. The Ontario Hospital Association has stated that a majority of Ontario hospitals are facing "serious financial challenges." We hear on a daily basis about hospitals that are being forced to fire nurses, cut beds, cut services, eliminate emergency rooms, and people who are postponing surgery—they're closing surgical units, operating rooms.

I want to ask you, what plan do you have to deal with the crisis that we are seeing today in our hospitals when they don't have enough funding to balance their budget, when the costs have increased?

Hon. David Caplan: First of all, I'd like to say to the member, I reject the premise of her question. The crisis that we had in health care under her government is when there were absolute cuts: an immediate 7% cut to funding for our health care partners. Those days are over. They would come back, however, I would say to the member opposite, if her plan to cut the Ontario health premium—a \$3-billion cut to health care—were ever implemented.

This government has the courage to invest in our vital health care services. Since 2003, we've embarked on a plan of unprecedented investment to build a more sustainable health care system in Ontario. Health care spending has increased by 37% since 2003-04, the highest level that it has ever been in the province of Ontario. So to highlight: a 32% increase to hospital funding, a province-wide wait time initiative that has seen—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Despite the rhetoric, this government still has no plan, and that's the biggest problem that we face today. It also stands in stark contrast to the plan we had. We actually increased hospital base funding by 40%. I'm very proud of the continuum of care that we created.

But I say to you today, we are seeing cuts on an annual basis, whether it's Barrie, Owen Sound, Cambridge, Quinte, St. Mary's, or Kingston General, who have cut 157 full-time positions and eliminated 20 beds. I ask you today: You've had five years to address growing hospital volumes as well as developing a population needs-based funding formula. When are you going to get the job done?

Hon. David Caplan: The member opposite can fabricate all she wishes. However, the truth of the matter is that those members cut services to health care, fired thousands of nurses right across the province, closed 28 hos-

pitals in the province of Ontario. By stark contrast, 630,000 more Ontarians have access to a family doctor who did not previously; 8,900 more nurses have been hired; we've had a 50% increase, a \$1-billion increase, to long-term care. The plan is working and it's going to continue.

The health care sector continues to rise as a dominant employer in Ontario now and will for years to come. Our population continues to age, and demands on our health care system will continue to increase.

Patient care will remain my top priority. That means we're going to hire more nurses; we're going to recruit more doctors. We need them in our hospitals, we need them in our long-term-care—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: This minister has now been in his place for several months, and I can tell you that people in the province are pretty tired of the rhetoric, reaching back, trying to communicate messages which are not truthful. For example, we increased funding by \$10 billion, despite the fact that the Chrétien Liberals cut health payments by \$2.8 billion. So maybe you'd better speak the truth.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment, please.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Oh, certainly, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Withdraw.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Yes, withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. David Caplan: I'm happy to compare the record of this government with the record of this member and her government any day of the week. Their record is one of firing health care professionals. Their record is one of closing hospitals. Our record: We are rebuilding hospitals; over 100 health care capital projects; over 8,900 nurses hired here in the province of Ontario in our first five years alone; and a plan to hire an additional 9,000.

We have worked very hard to eliminate a hidden deficit left behind by the members opposite, while at the same time improving the level of care and the level of service in our communities.

This member, unfortunately, has no creditability when it comes to health care in the province of Ontario, given the sorry record, given the sorry state of affairs, that she and her colleagues—the member can read old Conservative Party press releases all she wishes. But—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Deputy Premier.

Yesterday, we heard that you have appointed Jim Arnett as your special adviser on the auto industry. It's good to see that you've finally recognized that your auto strategy is broken and needs fixing. Today's official opening of the Toyota plant is good news, to be sure, but

the industry as a whole, as you know, is reeling. While I'm confident in the expertise of Mr. Arnett, I'm hopeful that you will also engage in significant consultations with other interested parties, consider various points of view, and listen carefully to critics of all stripes.

Deputy Leader, can you promise here today that your new auto strategy will include broad and meaningful consultation?

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to say to the honourable member that I understand that when you have the word "opposition" in your title, it does set you up for a certain kind of contrast.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Nobody would know better than you.

Hon. George Smitherman: Indeed, as the honourable member said, at different times I've had that role, which I consider to be a privileged one as well.

I think that people watching the honourable member and listening to his words—as if the circumstances which are well known to people with respect to the economic challenges are something that are just Ontario circumstances. So the honourable member's criticism about the auto strategy and the like does seem a little bit odd, especially considering that that member and his party voted constantly against supporting the emergence of a bigger and stronger automotive sector in the province of Ontario.

Jim Arnett is a quality individual. We have confidence in the work that he'll do. I'll be happy, by way of supplementary, to tell—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'm a little disappointed in that answer. I'm a little skeptical, because this government has shown very little willingness to co-operate or listen. They have a nasty reputation for formulating policy alone and sticking to it at all costs. Whether it's because of stubbornness, pride or blind ambition, it is inappropriate during this harsh economic crisis. Minister, why should we believe you this time?

1040

Hon. George Smitherman: Not a lot of value added on the honourable member's part, in terms of the quality of the question that he's asking. Everybody recognizes that the automotive sector—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook, who is not in his seat, to withdraw the comment that he just made.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Hon. George Smitherman: I think it's very, very important—

Mr. Peter Kormos: He's got to withdraw from his own seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable member to return to his seat, please, and withdraw the comment that he made. I ask him to withdraw the comment that he made.

Mr. Tim Hudak: From my own seat, I withdraw the comment from the other seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: As representatives, we in the opposition want to bring forward the ideas of our constituents. We want to share the knowledge we have gained from our own consultations, but unless you give us a forum and unless you allow for real consultation, we will only see more of the same, more talk and more games.

We saw it during their phony, self-congratulatory debate on the economy. What a political game that was. We see it every day in committee, where all the opposition amendments are routinely squashed. We saw it when they refused to form all-party committees, as requested by my colleague from Newmarket—Aurora. We saw it in the young drivers' bill, where the people who were most affected were talked down to and ignored—the teenage drivers. Again and again this government acts alone. Minister, how will you include opposition voices and when will you begin to sincerely listen to what is being said?

Hon. George Smitherman: When the member has something of quality to offer would be a good starting point, because in three questions, all that the honourable member had to offer was a litany of partisan digs. As an example, he talks about how circumstances at the committee haven't worked out as the member might have hoped, but he fails to recognize that when he was a member of the party that was a government, they didn't even have committees.

The matter at hand is an important one and Jim Arnett is an accomplished individual who has lent expertise to the efforts with respect to Stelco that have resulted in sustained employment and economic activity. Working with the government of Canada, which is an important part of the priority in this circumstance, we believe Mr. Arnett can help to lead us forward in a fashion which sustains, as best as possible, the automotive sector in the province of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

POVERTY

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is to the Acting Premier. After 1,400 days in office, the McGuinty government finally promised a poverty plan. Today, another 430 days after that, the McGuinty government now says that it has a plan, but that's all it is, a plan, and a plan that ignores hundreds of thousands of Ontarians who struggle in poverty—youth, people with disabilities, laid-off older workers, new immigrants, people of colour and aboriginal people. But the question is this: How many more days, months and years will Ontarians have to wait for the actual investments to take on poverty, not just the plan?

Hon. George Smitherman: We're into one of these rather awkward moments where the forward gaze of the

leader of the third party has outstripped information available to him. I know that he wants to foreshadow negative and pessimistic circumstances, but what people in the province of Ontario—the hundreds and the thousands who offered contributions through the course of a very important, crucial and well-informed discussion on poverty—will see is a government that's committed to moving forward in a fashion which uses real measures and targets. This is historic in the province of Ontario.

On the matter of investments, the honourable member really does need to take a review of the public accounts, which will be a very, very powerful demonstration of the extraordinary contribution that has been made by our government to the circumstances for people living in poverty and to the services that those same individuals call upon. There is more that needs to be done and today's report will—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Well, the McGuinty government talks about something being outstripped. The only thing that's been outstripped is a McGuinty government that has talked about poverty for five years and done next to nothing as poverty has increased and deepened in the province of Ontario.

The reality is that if anything is going to be done about poverty, the minimum wage will have to become a living wage. Will we see an announcement today to increase the minimum wage to \$10.25 an hour now and \$11 an hour by 2011? Will we see a commitment today to fund 7,000 affordable housing units this year? Will we see a commitment today to have a full Ontario child benefit now, not waiting until 2011? Will we see a commitment to social assistance benefits that actually cover the cost of rent, of keeping a roof over someone's head? Will we see a commitment to any of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Deputy?

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to thank the honourable member for the question, because as he enumerated all of those sub-questions, those themes, he actually helped to illustrate the areas where our government has been active already. Past actions are a very, very good demonstration of future intentions. The Ontario child benefit has emerged as a substantial financial contribution to the families who are living in lower-income circumstances in the province of Ontario.

The minimum wage that the honourable member asked about has been raised five times. I would say that our commitment to continue to raise the minimum wage is one of those things which have been supported by the people of the Ontario. They had an opportunity in the last election to support the honourable member and his party's call for the increase all at once, and that didn't happen. But we've moved forward five times, and we'll continue to move forward with meaningful increases in the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Again, I asked if the government was going to commit to any of these things, and again silence from the McGuinty government, just as there has been next to silence on an issue of a dental program, something that was announced now almost a year and a half ago, and not one red cent has gone into a dental program for low-income families, low-income kids.

Government talks again about the minimum wage. The fact of the matter is Ontario's minimum wage is a poverty minimum wage. It doesn't come anywhere close to the cost of living.

We return to the question at hand again: Will there be a substantial new investment in these things which people living in poverty say would really make a difference, or are we simply going to hear more talk, more promises to maybe, perhaps, possibly do something in the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Deputy?

Hon. George Smitherman: It sounds like the honourable member used the last few words of his question to define his time in politics.

What this bill is going to be about is the real measures and targets that have been called for by so many of the hundreds of thousands of people who participated in the discussion over the course of the last many, many months. We're proud of the work that our cabinet colleague Deb Matthews has led, as an individual who is able to bring to that effort the capacity, from a statistician's standpoint, to analyze the numbers and circumstances for people and the heart of someone who's very dedicated to making improvements in these areas.

Through hundreds of millions of dollars of investments so far, in things like the Ontario child benefit, we've made a meaningful difference in the lives of Ontarians, and especially Ontario's children, living in lower-income circumstances. Today's announcement will be a demonstration of the government's commitment to be held accountable to work alongside others as we—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

POVERTY

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the acting Premier: The reality is that this has been a government for five years, a government that has talked about poverty for five years, but a government that has lacked any sense of urgency of addressing poverty for five years. This is a government that thinks it's fine to increase its own pay by 40% in 19 months, but says to people who can barely keep a roof over their heads, no increase in the housing allowance in social assistance benefits to cover housing. This is a government, once again, that says, "Oh, yes, there will be a child benefit, but you have to wait five years before anything meaningful happens from a child benefit." This is a government that says, "Yes, we'll raise the minimum wage, but we're going to keep it a poverty wage."

The question again is: We hear this government talk about a plan. Are there going to be any real, actual, new investments—

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Deputy?

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, the honourable member's characterizations of the Ontario child benefit, which has received hundreds of millions of dollars of investment on an ongoing basis, which rises every year and will continue to do so, is an example of a place where the member's credibility runs up against reality. We know the honourable member wants to characterize these efforts in a negative fashion—of course, that's his responsibility—but I think that what we see today in the actions that will be taken by our government is, for the first time in the history of the province of Ontario, the willingness on the part of a government to adopt real measures and targets. This holds us collectively accountable to progress in this very, very crucial area. We're undertaking this in difficult and challenging economic times, for sure, but there's a strong demonstration associated with today's activities of a contribution and commitment to the people of the province of Ontario who are living in impoverished circumstances.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government wants to talk about "for the first time in Ontario." What's really happening is, for the first time in Ontario, just in the last weeks, we are seeing reports that more people are being forced to food banks than ever before in the history of the province, and that more children are living in poverty than ever before in the history of the province. That's what's really historic about the last week or so, the last month or so. But what we want to see is, is there going to be anything besides a promise to possibly, maybe, perhaps, do something about poverty in five years? Children can't wait five years to eat. They need to eat every day. What's the McGuinty government going to do to really address poverty instead of talking about five years from now?

Hon. George Smitherman: Children do need to eat every day, and I thank the honourable member for raising the issue of student nutrition, which has experienced, just this year, a doubling. This is an example where the honourable member's credibility really runs shy. He said for the first time in Ontario, in the last few weeks and months, that food bank use, as an example, has been on the rise. This is the best example of a point we have been making for a long, long time, that for five years in the province of Ontario the honourable member was on a prolonged bathroom break. We know that Ontario has faced challenging circumstances—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just would say to all the members that the personal shots across the floor from all sides—and it's on all sides; I just ask that we would have some respect for the each other within this chamber.

Hon. George Smitherman: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, perhaps "missing in action" would be a more appropriate way to characterize the honourable member's circum-

stances. He comes to the Legislature today and he pretends that the circumstances that are present in the world are circumstances that have never been seen before. We will rise to the challenge and work with Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I think what we've seen here is an indication of the sincerity of the McGuinty government.

For example, in Peel region, 45% of newcomers with children under age six live in poverty, says the director of Family Services of Peel. She says, "This is startling news, a wake-up call to all of us." What is the response of the McGuinty government's spokesperson? He refers to bathroom breaks. I think what we're seeing here is a real indication of the lack of sincerity of the McGuinty government. They will promise, they will talk, they will develop a plan, but when you look at the details, it's always about something that might perhaps, possibly, maybe happen five years from now.

The question remains: As more kids are forced to food banks, as more kids are living in poverty, what's the McGuinty government actually going to do today, other than refer to bathroom breaks?

Hon. George Smitherman: Well, the honourable member didn't like the point, but he wants to belabour it. It's a very, very direct reflection on the fact that the honourable member for five years—

Interjections.

Hon. George Smitherman: For five years, the honourable member was part of a government in challenging economic times that saw welfare roles double. But he brings to this Legislature today a statement that led with the comment that only in the last weeks and months have the people in the province of Ontario been faced with the challenges that they're facing. This is an assertion which has no foundation in fact and is irresponsible. At the heart of it, what we see from the efforts of our government is a willingness to adopt real measures and targets upon which we will all be held accountable as we move forward in partnership with dedicated advocates and others across Ontario to address the underlying circumstances for people in this province who live in poverty. We do those on behalf of those people—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Deputy Premier as well and, as he knows, we only have four sitting days left in this chamber.

For months now, if not years, we have been expressing concerns from the official opposition's perspective with respect to the economic challenges this province is facing. We've asked for a jobs plan. We've asked for meaningful restraint. Just earlier today, we heard that Henniges Automotive in Welland has announced they're laying off over 300 people at the end of January. Minis-

ter, we've seen you increase spending, going from a \$5-billion surplus to a \$500-million deficit. The province is now in have-not status. We see the Minister of Finance talk about symbolic restraint. With four days left, when are we going to see a real jobs plan and a real restraint program?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This government is going to continue to work with all families and communities who have lost work as a result of the crisis going on in the world economy. We have invested, for instance—and I'll go through the full list—\$9.9 billion in infrastructure, which has created more than 100,000 jobs. Those jobs are on the street today. There's no doubt that there's more to do.

In terms of restraint, we have laid out \$1.1 billion in our budget of last year. In my fall statement we added another \$110 million across a range of things, including travel and accommodation. Finally, the other day we laid out further restraint measures. There's more to do. We're taking—

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Step by step.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: My colleague says we're going to take a step-by-step approach to this, and we will be better and stronger when we get out of this situation.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: They're great at announcements but that's about as far as it goes. We talk about symbolism with respect to restraint. The real symbol with respect to this government's approach to spending—we highlighted at least two yesterday. One was your appointed president of the WSIB making close to half a million dollars a year, living an extravagant lifestyle, staying at the Waldorf-Astoria for \$1,300 a night; your Minister of Government Services spending \$108,000 last year at the Royal York; these people—your people, your government, Minister, your appointees—exploiting their access to scarce tax dollars. Apparently you're addicted to reruns of Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous. Minister, you're the Liberal Robin Leach in this picture. We ask you once again, when are we going to see a real, meaningful restraint program on the part of your government?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Tell us about it, Robin.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Member for Renfrew.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The leader of the third party may want to turn to his colleague next to him and ask him why he spent \$1,000 a month on alcohol and food as a minister. He may want to ask why Mr. Flaherty stayed at the Willard Hotel, and The Pierre hotel in New York, and why his colleague travelled to Tokyo and Hong Kong, all on the taxpayers' expense.

You know, there is always more to do—oh, we've got the list and I'll be happy to table it. There's a lot more. There's always more to do, and we welcome the conversion on the road to Damascus by the opposition on these issues. Frankly—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Deputy Premier. Ontarians living in poverty have waited a long, long time for this day, including the adult with autism from Barrie who works hard to augment her ODSP benefits, only to have half of her earnings clawed back by this government; including the 45-year-old auto parts worker in St. Thomas whose employment benefits have run out and who can no longer afford to pay the rent; and including the 21-year-old from London saddled with student debt and unable to find a full-time job. What is this government planning to do for adults in serious need?

1100

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to say to the honourable member that we've noted, of course, his very genuine interest in matters related to poverty. That's why I know that he'll be looking forward to this afternoon and what it holds. At the heart of it, what he'll see on the part of the government is a willingness to imbed the principles of real targets and measures that can hold us all accountable to the progress that's necessary for people who are living in impoverished circumstances.

He spoke first off about a circumstance with ODSP. In this example, already there have been, I think, two occasions when the amount of resource that an individual could earn would be exempt from clawback, or other reforms. This is a substantial improvement over the record that past parties had with respect to ODSP and is a further example of how we've been working to try and enhance the revenue generation, income earning potential of people living on ODSP.

Mr. Michael Prue: The fact still remains that you are clawing back money from people with Down's syndrome and autism, and it is a shame.

Something that we often hear from modest-income Ontarians is that poverty is all about the shame of being treated as though one were less worthy, one were less human than those who do not live in poverty. Disabled adults are penalized for trying to lift themselves out of poverty. Shelter allowances continue to be grossly inadequate, and the minimum wage won't increase now when workers need it the most. Why won't this government recognize that poor adults deserve our help too?

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member in his very question has made a misstatement. The minimum wage indeed has already moved five times, and it will continue to move forward. We've laid out that plan. There's certainty in it for the individuals who are earning it and for the companies that are working and obligated to pay it. We've been able to make increases in the minimum wage, just as we've been able to substantially free up resources for earning potential for people living on Ontario disability support.

I accept the honourable member's point that he would like to see that at higher levels, or no clawback indeed,

but I remind the honourable member that that has not been the history in this place. When people who sit around him were around, the clawback was far more extraordinary and the disincentive to earn income for people on ODSP was much, much greater. We've made substantial progress in that very area, and I thank the honourable member for bringing it to the attention of the Legislature today.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, in the poverty consultations in Peterborough in May and June, many community groups raised the issue of adequate affordable housing. I know that you have been to Peterborough to visit new housing projects like the 60-unit Myrtle Terrace project that was funded through the affordable housing program. But some housing units in Peterborough are aging, falling into disrepair. There are 2,000 social housing units in the city, Minister. People in Peterborough who rely on affordable housing can't wait for repairs. They need money now. I know Peterborough council is working hard. Minister, I'm demanding today to know, what are we doing for those units?

Hon. Jim Watson: Mr. Speaker, I didn't write that question.

Let me begin by thanking the honourable member, who served on Peterborough council for 18 years and together with Mayor Ayotte has done such good work in providing their share of funds for social housing. But they are not in it alone. The McGuinty government is there with the good people of Peterborough, and in the 2008 budget, my colleague Minister Duncan provided \$100 million province-wide for housing repair funds. Peterborough's share was close to \$850,000. When this funding was announced by my colleague the member from Peterborough, Susan Bacque of the housing division of Peterborough said, "This is very good news." I understand that Peterborough will be putting the money towards new doors, upgraded heating and plumbing, and energy-efficient upgrades. We look forward to working with the people of Peterborough to ensure adequate and affordable housing in that community.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary? The member for Oakville.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: In Halton, there's also a need for affordable housing. I know my own community of Oakville is doing what it can to invest in affordable housing. No doubt the uploads this government just announced last month are going to help.

The Tories downloaded services, including housing, onto my municipality. They provided no support for municipal service. The Harris-Eves and the Hudak Tories have forced these costs onto municipalities.

Minister, as a former councillor myself, I know the importance of provincial and federal dollars for housing. Municipalities can't go it alone. They need the province and the federal government at the table.

Minister, what can you do to support my community's efforts to invest in affordable housing for the citizens of Oakville?

Hon. Jim Watson: I thank the honourable member from Oakville, because he, too, served for many years on municipal council and understood the damage that was done by the previous government when the downloading took place.

We're doing our share. Halton region has received \$1.83 million to help with social housing repairs in the region. Halton region also, as a result of the Investing in Ontario Act, received \$41.7 million. The town of Oakville itself received \$7.4 million.

I know that Mayor Burton has a passion and interest, as the member from Oakville does, with respect to social housing.

I'm hoping that municipalities will use a portion of the Investing in Ontario Act for social housing repair and new builds, because it is eligible, it is qualified, for that.

Next year, we are going to be beginning consultations on a long-term affordable housing strategy. We look forward to coming into Halton region and other parts of the province to hear, first-hand, good ideas and good suggestions on how to improve—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

MINISTRY SPENDING

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is to the Minister of Health Promotion. The 2006-07 public accounts for your ministry state that nearly \$1.1 million was paid to a company by the name of Bensimon Byrne, a very Liberal-friendly ad agency, to put it mildly. More than anything, this company is known for producing the famous Dalton McGuinty promise-breaking "I won't raise your taxes" ads. Minister, can you tell the members of this Legislature what Ontario taxpayers received in return for that nearly \$1.1 million?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I thank the member opposite for the question. I would like to take the information that the member opposite has provided and I will look into it further and provide her with an answer to that question.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Minister, earlier this year, I requested the order paper question of the regional breakdown of what you've allocated for advertising for the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. Since 2006, your own ministry spent over \$10.2 million on media buying services. That's almost \$14,000 per day, every day. So we've already asked you earlier this year to provide breakdowns.

You need to be honest with the people of Ontario. We're certainly living in tough economic times, when we have to tighten our belts. We want some accountability from the ministry on what she's spending the money on. We've already asked the order paper question, and we didn't get an answer. When will the minister provide this answer?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I'm certainly going to take this opportunity to talk about some of the ways our money is spent in the Ministry of Health Promotion to address the issue of smoking, smoking cessation and smoking prevention.

As you know and as the member opposite knows, smoking is the number one preventable cause of death in Ontario. In fact, 13,000 Ontarians die each year from smoking. As a result of that, we invest in many different smoking cessation products.

We have to tell you about the products. We've provided close to \$15 million for cessation programs in 2007 and 2008. To date, \$8.9 million dollars has been approved to support cessation—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is a question to the Deputy Premier.

The availability of licensed, affordable, not-for-profit, publicly funded child care must be a priority for poverty reduction in the province of Ontario. Only 12% of Ontario families have access to child care in this province. There are more than 23,000 eligible children on waiting lists in this province who are unable to obtain subsidies for affordable, licensed child care.

As part of her poverty reduction strategy, will the Minister of Children and Youth Services be committing to adequate, stable core funding to meet the need for child care spaces in Ontario for all families?

1110

Hon. George Smitherman: I do want to thank the honourable member for the question and encourage her to watch, with interest, the announcements today and the actions that stem from them. There are associated with the issue of poverty, of course, a wide variety of influences; the honourable member has raised an additional one. That's why, at the heart of it, we viewed the word "comprehensive" as essential to the work that's being undertaken.

I think that the honourable member will see, from the announcements that take place, the work that the minister has done in leading our government forward and creating a framework that will allow for targets and measures to be adopted against which we can all be held accountable and that we can all strive to make progress, even in these uncertain and challenging economic times.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In the response I heard nothing about child care, nothing at all. The reality is that struggling families in this province are desperate to break the cycle of poverty, and it's very clear that a robust child care program can break the cycle of poverty.

This government has talked about a full-day learning program. Nobody even knows when or if it's going to be implemented, but what we do know is that's not a substitute for child care for all children of all ages in this province. We want to know, and we want to know very clearly from this government: Do they have a commit-

ment to implement a child care program for all of the children of this province that is affordable, that is accessible universally and that is reliant on the QUAD principles, as was once their plan some seven or five years ago?

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to thank the honourable member. The honourable member knows of the Best Start circumstances in the Hamilton community that has led to the creation of more than 2,000 child care spots. We think this is a very strong example of the commitment that our government has made. But, like I said earlier, we recognize there is a wide variety of areas that can benefit from additional resource and that families and children living in poverty can benefit from. But at the heart of it, we think that it's important that there be targets and measures associated with that, that we can hold accountable the resources that are put into the system to make sure they're achieving the resources that are desired.

On the matter of full-day kindergarten, I want to say to the honourable member that there are exciting opportunities that will be forthcoming, and I appreciate, again, the honourable member raising an issue which demonstrates further the government's commitment to our youngest citizens.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I spent many years working within the Ontario education system, both as a school trustee and chair of the safe schools action team. I've often heard from educators who told me how challenging it can be to help troubled students find appropriate mental health supports. I know the government is committed to connecting Ontarians of all ages with needed mental health programs. It is a difficult task and one this government has been working to achieve since it was elected in 2003, but I have still heard accusations from some of my constituents that we have not done enough yet. Can the Minister of Health reassure the House that we are working to improve mental health services in Ontario?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member from Guelph for the question. I'd like to assure her and her constituents and, indeed, all Ontarians that mental health and addictions are one of my top priorities. Our government will continue to work hard to improve the capacity and the quality of Ontario's mental health system.

I'm pleased to inform the House that today more than 200,000 Ontarians who did not have access to mental health services in the year 2003 are getting the help they need. Since being elected, we have increased funding to community mental health agencies by more than \$200 million. That's a 50% increase to over 300 community mental health agencies. I believe the way we deal, as a society, with those living with mental health issues, in many ways is a measure of us as a compassionate soci-

ety. I know Ontarians are compassionate people. That is why I'm confident that we will have the support we need to continue improving the province's mental health and addiction services.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm happy to hear that mental health is one of the minister's top priorities, and I know in my riding of Guelph, one of the big steps forward has to be to introduce an assertive community treatment team to help people in the community with really complex needs.

But to truly improve Ontario's mental health system, we need to better understand the needs of the people who use it. Too often there is a stigma around mental health and addiction issues. Thankfully, it seems times are changing. Today, there is greater awareness of mental health issues than there was when the McGuinty government first took office. I'm confident that greater awareness can create a momentum for change.

I ask the Minister of Health, what more can be done to improve awareness of mental health issues and to improve the services that we are providing?

Hon. David Caplan: I again thank the member for the question.

I do think that members from all parties in this House can agree that we need to work together on this important issue. As a province and as a government, we need to speak more openly about mental health and addictions. I'm sure that the province is ready for a constructive conversation.

That's why I want to take this moment to thank the member from Whitby-Oshawa. She has proposed creating a select committee to develop a comprehensive Ontario mental health and addiction strategy. The member opposite is starting a much-needed dialogue.

We have made significant investments, but we want to find ways to link these efforts in a more coordinated fashion. I'm excited to work in partnership with stakeholders, with experts, with health care workers and indeed with all of our colleagues in the House. Together we can develop a long-term—

Interjection.

Hon. David Caplan: Well, maybe not the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek.

Together we can develop a long-term mental health and addiction strategy that will improve mental health—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

UNIVERSITY LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is to the Deputy Premier.

This week, York University students as well as CUPE held demonstrations at Queen's Park in protest of the York University strike. Both sides are clearly frustrated with the four-week-old work stoppage and are reaching out to the government.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. If the members want to have a discussion, I'd encourage them to go to the outer antes to have that discussion and to not be hollering across the floor. I'm trying to listen to a question, and there's a minister who's trying to listen to the question as well.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you, Speaker.

Both sides in this strike are clearly frustrated with the four-week-old work stoppage and are reaching out to the government. The mediator has been unsuccessful. The strike isn't any closer to being resolved than it was on the day it started, perhaps less so.

Deputy Premier, I have repeatedly asked for back-to-work legislation so the students can return to their studies. Is today the day that you'll see the light and end the strike?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: As I had a chance to say earlier this week, the honourable member doesn't have any monopoly in this Legislature on concern for students. I think all members are concerned about the situation facing students at York University.

Universities, as the member knows, are autonomous institutions.

All of us call, on both sides, to get back to the bargaining table and to reach an agreement as quickly as possible so that the students can resume their work in the classroom.

The government, as the member knows, has offered mediation, and we have a mediator on-site who is trying to work with both sides.

Again, I think every member of this Legislature calls on both sides to get back to the bargaining table and reach an agreement as quickly as possible.

Mr. Peter Shurman: This is double-talk.

With questions, statements and a private member's bill, I have attempted to get this government moving in the right direction. I ask that the government table and pass back-to-work legislation before this Legislature rises for the winter break next week.

The university has stated that it cannot go any further and has offered binding arbitration. Students, who are paying the highest price in the strike yet don't have a voice at the table, were here this week asking for your help, and so was the union.

Are you really willing to go on your winter break, enjoy the holiday season, and completely abandon 50,000 students, whose only hope to salvage their academic year is to have this Legislature pass back-to-work legislation?

I ask again: Will you finally step up to the table, put back-to-work legislation on it and end the strike?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, the member seems to come across as though he has a monopoly on concern for students. Every member of this Legislature is concerned about the situation at York University.

I think the member has to acknowledge the fact that York University is an autonomous institution.

All of us are concerned about what's going on there, and all of us urge both sides to get back to the table as quickly as possible. Through the offices of the Ministry of Labour, we have a mediator who's on-site, who's working with both sides, and we call on them, in the strongest terms possible, to return to the bargaining table for the best interests of the students.

1120

HIGHWAY 406

Mr. Peter Kormos: I have a question to the Minister of Transportation. Does the minister understand how important it is to resume the four-laning and extension project of Highway 406, especially when the region has been so hard hit with job losses and when regional leaders are scouring the globe, desperately looking for job-creating investment?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Yes, I do. I know sometimes we say, "Thank you for asking that question," and sometimes it's not always sincere when the questions come. This one is sincere. I know of the member's genuine interest in the expansion of Highway 406. He will know that our government expanded the full four lanes to Port Robinson Road, and he will know that it's important to continue that expansion.

I can report to him that the planning and preliminary design study is under way for the widening of the next section of Highway 406 from two to four lanes between Port Robinson Road and East Main Street in Welland. As part of the planning study, a range of options will be considered for the design of the termination of the 406 extension and East Main Street. In the supplementary, I'll elaborate.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Knowing, as you do, Minister, that the crisis in lost jobs is as bad in Port Colborne as it is in St. Catharines, Niagara Falls and Hamilton, will you tell us now that those plans include ensuring that the city of Port Colborne and that four-laned Highway 3, with its connection to the Peace Bridge and the QEW, is a part of the plan, in terms of the extension of Highway 406, to assist that hard-hit region in attempting to recover from these desperate economic times?

Hon. James J. Bradley: The member makes a very good point when he says that when we are developing these highways and widening them and expanding them, it's not only for the purpose of meeting the existing situation in terms of traffic flow, but for assisting in economic development. I can tell him that it's anticipated that the study I made reference to will be completed in the spring of 2009. It will be followed by detailed design, property acquisition and the remaining environmental approvals.

We're making every effort towards getting the project under way by the summer of 2011. Construction timing is dependent on obtaining environmental approvals, property and funding. And yes, further study will go into the road as it leaves Welland and heads down towards Port

Colborne. The municipal officials there have made representations. I've met with them, and the member has expressed his view on this. I thank him for raising the profile of this issue at the appropriate time.

CLASS SIZE

Mr. David Oraziatti: My question is for the Minister of Education. As a former educator, I know first-hand the importance of investing in our youth so that they can reach their full potential, especially in today's knowledge-based economy.

Yesterday, when looking at the primary class size numbers in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie, released by your ministry for the current school year, they showed that 90% of primary classes in the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board and the Algoma District School Board now have 20 or fewer students, and 100% of students attending schools at both local boards are learning in classrooms with 23 or fewer students. This means more individual attention for some of our youngest learners, and this is absolutely crucial to building a solid foundation for learning. Yet members of the opposition say our cap is overly rigid and that we are inadequately supporting these lower class sizes.

Minister, can you clarify this issue for members of the House?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you to the member for his question. He is truly a tireless advocate for education in Sault Ste. Marie and across the province.

Because of his experience as an educator, he knows how important it is that our youngest students have the opportunity to have access to their teachers and smaller classes. In fact, across the province, we now have over 90% of those primary classes at 20 students or fewer. That is a huge accomplishment, considering that when we came to office in 2003, only 31% of those classes were at 20 students or fewer. So that means that 540,000 students are now getting more support, which is up from only 166,000 five years ago.

We know from the research that if we can get those class sizes lower in the early years so that they have access to teachers, those kids will do—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. David Oraziatti: Thank you, Minister. This is indeed progress. Smaller class sizes have been identified as a priority by educators across the province, as studies show that greater attention in the early years leads to increased success for students throughout their school career.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank parents, teachers, students, principals, support staff and all educators who have partnered with us to make the positive impact in Sault Ste. Marie's elementary schools and in elementary schools across the province.

Some Ontarians are concerned that the reduction in primary class sizes has led to other challenges. Issues have been raised that our plan is not flexible enough to

respond to local needs, and it's causing class sizes to balloon in grades 4 to 8. Minister, can you comment on the flexibility of our plan regarding class size challenges in grades 4 to 8, please?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We know that you can't just magically reduce class size without making investments, so in Algoma there are 23 additional primary class size teachers, and in the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board there are 27, which means that we have made the investment to get new teachers into the system. What that means is that the average class sizes in the grade 4-to-8 panel have not been affected as they might have been had we not made those investments. In fact, the averages have actually gone down in grades 4 to 8 from 25.7 students to 24.9 students. The impact has not been what it would have been had we not made the investments.

We knew when we came into office and we put this plan in place that 100% of classes at 20 students or fewer was going to be too rigid. That's why we introduced the flexibility of 90% of classes at 20 students or fewer—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New Question.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. In the central east region, 321 people have applied for Passport funding; only 63 have been successful. In Peterborough alone, over 111 individuals with a disability are sitting on a waiting list, waiting for some action. Will you commit today to make the Passport program a priority and give some hope to the hundreds of individuals sitting on a waiting list that you're actually going to do something?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I want to thank the member for her question. It's a very good question, and this member is talking about the investment in Passport. What we invested is 100% more than what her party provided when they were in power, because this program was created in 2005, and we have invested over \$27 million in annualized funding, which has supported more than 2,100 individuals.

We know that we need to do more for people living with developmental disabilities. We know that we have to create a link between when they graduate from high school to when they—we don't want them to stay at home. Parents need to continue to work, so we need to invest in Passport and we will—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: This minister continues to talk about history. I want to talk about the future. I want to talk about Anne Currie and her daughter Megan in Peterborough. Her daughter Megan has been aged out of the school system. She doesn't have any other options. All you have offered Anne Currie and Megan is a spot on the waiting list, Minister. They expect more; they want more.

I am asking today if you will stop talking and actually bring some action to this Passport funding file and bring some hope to the hundreds of individuals who want to see action by this government, not a history lesson.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I understand that the member doesn't want to talk about history, because their history is not too brilliant.

I want to say that we have invested more than \$27 million. This year alone, we've invested another \$7 million into Passport. We know we need to do more. We know that we need to invest in Passport. Bill 77, that we just adopted, is a really good bill that will permit us to do that and more.

Interjection: It's a landmark.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It's a landmark bill. But what is strange is that when we put more money for Passport, what this party did is they voted against it.

Hon. David Caplan: They voted against it. Shame on them.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: They voted against it. I hope that the next time we put money into the budget for Passport, this member will vote for it.

MINING INDUSTRY

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Today, Vale Inco announced that it is shutting down South mine. Three hundred sixty-five workers will be redeployed. But contract workers developing the Copper Cliff Deep project won't be as lucky. Hundreds will be put out of a job with project postponement.

Given the serious impact that lower base metal prices will have on northeastern Ontario communities, when will the minister table a long-term strategy to sustain mining jobs and protect affected workers and their families?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you to the member from Nickel Belt for the question. Indeed, it was not good news coming out of the Sudbury operation of Vale Inco this morning. I think everyone in the Legislature recognizes that the global financial crisis has had an impact on all industry, and certainly the mining sector is not exempt from that. Yes, the announcement this morning will impact some workers. I'm very pleased that the key people at Vale Inco made it clear that they remain extremely committed to their Ontario operations, and obviously the large number of employees and operations they have in Sudbury, and that they intend to redeploy the workers at the Copper Cliff South mine.

As we go through these challenging times, we will work closely with the industry. You're right that the commodity prices have certainly gone down. There is certainly great optimism and hope they will rise again, but we are working closely with the industry, and our hearts go out to the workers who were affected today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: This announcement is the beginning of tough times for Sudbury and other mining

communities in northern Ontario. While we can't change international base metal prices by ourselves, we do need a long-term strategy to make those good mining jobs less susceptible to wild short-term market swings. Why won't the minister table a long-term strategy for the mining sector?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Certainly our government believes strongly that even in these challenging times the mining industry is, and will remain, a very important contributor to our economy, and I think that's the case.

Also, may I say that we are moving forward with modernization of the Mining Act, working very, very closely with industry, with other stakeholders and obviously with First Nations as well. We think that moving forward with that process and bringing forward clarity and stability will, in and of itself, be really positive news for the mining sector.

We are conscious of the impact the global financial crisis has had, and conscious of the impact that commodity prices have had, but we continue to work closely and remain optimistic, as does the mining sector itself, that indeed this will turn around. Most significant is the fact that not just the Vale Inco announcement today, but others who have had operations impacted are continuing their commitment to the mining sector, and they'll keep looking forward—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. The time for question period has expired. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1133 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PESTICIDES

Mr. Toby Barrett: I urge the Minister of the Environment to rethink his pesticide regulations. We feared the devil in the details and the devil has now reared his ugly head. Pesticide legislation was supposed to get rid of the patchwork of pesticide bylaws and create a level playing field. This was encouraging to industry, and they offered to work closely with the environment minister to assure that was achieved. What happened?

For example, this government promised cemetery boards they would be exempt; now they aren't. This government spoke of a three-year phase-in period to allow industry to adapt—again, a promise broken.

This legislation fails to clearly define "pesticide." It seems that the minister's office has arbitrarily assigned products to categories instead of using a scientific rationale.

Further, schedule 7 of the bill limits consumer choice, places burdens on retailers and allows products that cannot be used by licensed lawn care companies to be sold to individuals. How is that going to help the environment? The law will not control insect infestations.

I've received e-mails from small lawn care companies, many who feel that this legislation will force them to wind up their hoses.

To the Minister of the Environment: Given the economic demise, will you not work with all stakeholders to ensure—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

NATIONAL FAMILY DINNER NIGHT

Mr. Dave Levac: I wish to recognize in the House today the efforts of M&M Meat Shops from Canada, including those in my riding of Brant, for their contribution to building stronger family ties across Canada through their National Family Dinner Night program.

Now in its fourth year, this program encourages families to sit down to dinner together, an idea based on the fact that family time produces a number of benefits to all involved. Research has shown that children who frequently have family dinners are more likely to be emotionally content, have positive peer relationships and develop healthier eating habits.

Originally coming from a busy family of nine, I know how important it is to make time for something as simple as a shared meal together. While our family dinners sometimes had the odd squabble and discussions about whose turn it was to do the dishes, the fact of the matter is that we were all together as a family at that time. I feel that these family dinners were instrumental in my development and kept me close to my family, even today.

While the National Family Dinner Night program works to strengthen family relationships, for each person who is registered to participate in the program, M&M donates \$1 to the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of Canada. So far, over \$82,000 has been raised through the National Family Dinner Night program.

Family dinners build strong family relationships, which in turn serve to strengthen communities. For this, M&M's National Family Dinner Night program deserves our recognition and, indeed, our support.

Thank you to M&M of Canada, and thank you to all the families who participate in National Family Dinner Night.

SHIRLEY HICKMAN

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I rise in the House today to honour Ms. Shirley Hickman, a citizen in my riding of London—Fanshawe, who is a pioneer in victim services. Ms. Hickman is the founder and executive director of an organization that provides peer support to families who have suffered from a workplace fatality, life-altering illness or occupational disease. Threads of Life is the only organization of its kind in Canada and, in only five years, has assisted over 20,000 Canadians.

Threads of Life was created out of need. Ms. Hickman's son was involved in a workplace explosion and found no source of guidance or support. Threads of Life guides survivors in understanding the procedures, legal system and services offered to victims and their families. Even more importantly, it provides peer support and counselling to family members who are often in despair.

On November 27, Shirley Hickman received the 2008 Attorney General's Victim Services Award for outstanding achievement and dedication in the victim services field. Shirley is an example of the great citizens of my riding of London-Fanshawe. Her strength, creativity and courage make her the kind of person Ontario needs. I wish Ms. Hickman all the luck.

UNIVERSITY LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Peter Shurman: I rise today with the hope that my continued efforts, the voices and frustration of York University students and the members of CUPE who are here at Queen's Park this week will finally resonate with the McGuinty government and will result in the immediate introduction of back-to-work legislation.

This insanity must stop, and the McGuinty Liberals have the means to stop it. Why they haven't yet utilized those means to end the four-week-old York University strike is something that I can neither justify nor understand.

In response to my questions, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities answers only that I do not have the monopoly on caring about students and that they've offered mediation. That is not an acceptable response to my calls for immediate action. To hide behind the word "autonomy" is irresponsible for this government. If they care, as I do, about the academic futures that are being sabotaged by this strike, they will enact back-to-work legislation immediately, yet this government has done nothing and continues to hide behind excuses and messaging.

My constituents are outraged at the unreasonable demands of CUPE 3903. They are further concerned about the possibility of future disruptions in 2010. The university, meanwhile, has made it clear that they can't move further to meet CUPE's demands.

The McGuinty Liberals have to see the light and do what is right. They have to look ahead and commit to protect York U. Students have to be protected now, as well as students at many other universities, from the potential of work stoppages in 2010. It is high time that the McGuinty Liberals acted decisively to mitigate the consequences of their grave errors. They've allowed the CUPE 3903 strike to continue for four weeks, and it is their responsibility to end it now.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Gilles Bisson: There are thousands of Ontarians who work for the Ontario civil service—tens of thousands—and particularly those who work at maintaining our highways, making sure the remedial work is done to make our highways safe, plowing the roads and making sure they are salted in winter, so that we all can drive safely. And I've got to say there's a growing frustration within the civil service in regard to how this government is not dealing adequately with the demands that are being put at the bargaining table when it comes to negotiations.

These are people who work hard. These are people who have been with us in the province of Ontario for some years, making sure that our roads are safe. These are people who are only asking that this government doesn't do what the Ernie Eves government and the Mike Harris government did previously, which is to stymie the process of negotiations and not meet some of the demands that are put on the table.

I'm hearing from people I talk to, within OPSEU and others, who are involved in this, that they are feeling there's not much difference, quite frankly, between the way that this Dalton McGuinty government negotiates and a Mike Harris government negotiated before.

So I'm saying to the government across the way, you have an opportunity to do the right thing. You have an opportunity to go into bargaining and be fair employers, and make sure we are able to negotiate a contract for those workers at OPSEU who are trying to get a fair settlement when it comes to the very important work they do. I urge this government to do so. I urge them to take the responsibility as a government and as an employer to negotiate fairly with the brothers and sisters of OPSEU, and if you don't, then you're no different than Mike Harris.

OLYMPIC TORCH RELAY

Mr. Jeff Leal: On Friday, November 21, I had the distinct pleasure of attending a news conference at City Hall in Peterborough. The purpose of this news conference was to inform the residents of the riding of Peterborough that the Olympic flame would be travelling through our city on December 15, 2009, on its way to Vancouver for the opening of the 2010 Olympic Games.

The Olympic torch relay will touch over 90% of Canadians who live within one hour's drive of its route. The Vancouver 2010 torch relay will take 106 days to complete, will travel over 45,000 kilometres, and it will be the longest domestic torch relay in Olympic history, passing through 1,000 Canadian communities.

The flame inspires not just the athletes but all of us. It represents harmony between countries and provides an opportunity to forge new relationships and friendships. It brings the world together at one event in a spirit of unity and peace. December 15, 2009, will be a historic day for the great city of Peterborough.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Frank Klees: In a letter to the three federal opposition party leaders, I called on them to reconsider their plan to bring down the recently elected federal government, and I'm asking the Premier and every member of this House, to join this call for national stability. At a time when plants are closing and job losses are mounting, the last thing our country and our economy need is more uncertainty. The actions of Messrs. Dion, Layton and Duceppe are wrong-headed and self-serving, and threaten to plunge our already fragile manufacturing sector into crisis.

1310

This is a time when every member of every Parliament in the country should be working together to build confidence in our governments, our economy and our manufacturing sectors. The last thing we need is to be thrown into another election or to be led by a coalition of three political parties, one of which has no loyalty to Canada. They have no mandate to govern, have contradictory policies and have self-appointed the man who would be the Prime Minister should this so-called coalition have its way.

This is not the Canada I know, and we all have a responsibility to stop this abuse of power and protect the integrity of our parliamentary system of government.

STREETSVILLE

Mr. Bob Delaney: With the 2008 Christmas tree lighting ceremony, the events to celebrate 150 years of history and tradition in two great Ontario municipalities, my own village of Streetsville in Mississauga and the town of Hawkesbury in eastern Ontario, will be nearly over.

Streetsville village founder Timothy Street was granted 1,000 acres of land in a new township he had surveyed. In 1824, this area became known as Streetsville. The village was formally incorporated in 1858.

Streetsville has the largest number of historically designated buildings in all of Mississauga. All of western Mississauga got a taste of Streetsville during 2008. Ontario helped Streetsville publicize history and events throughout 2008. We completely renovated the Vic Johnston Arena, held a great Bread and Honey Festival in June, saw Shakespeare Under the Stars in a summer drizzle, brought together dozens of clowns for the kids, and closed historic Queen Street for an equally historic day-long celebration of Streetsville's 150th birthday on September 13.

We'll light the tree on Streetsville's 150th Christmas a week after Santa arrived in the biggest-ever parade in Mississauga history. The carollers will sing, the year will change, and the hard-working, creative and right neighbourly families who make up Streetsville in western Mississauga will set about making more memories and more history.

HAWKESBURY

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Last week, I had the privilege of attending the kick-off of the town of Hawkesbury's 150th anniversary. We gathered at the Robert Hartley Sports Complex to embrace Hawkesbury's rich history and promising future. The communities of Hawkesbury and Streetsville are thriving, just as they have been for the last 150 years.

Le premier maire de Hawkesbury était du nom de John Hamilton. La famille Hamilton était propriétaire d'une entreprise de marchand de bois sur la rivière des Outaouais. La famille Hamilton était sans aucun doute

très fière de leur fils John, qui, en plus d'avoir été le premier maire de la ville, a également été un membre fondateur du Sénat canadien.

The 150th anniversary of Hawkesbury is a time of celebration. So far, we know of an upcoming jamboree with 500 Scouts and the 2010 Olympic torch run ceremony.

I look forward to celebrating Hawkesbury's successes and I encourage my seatmates to pay a visit to the great town, which is also the neighbouring town of the 2011 IPM, the International Plowing Match.

J'encourage tous mes collègues à visiter la belle ville de Hawkesbury et celle de Streetsville.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE
ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 37, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act to protect Ontario's children / *Projet de loi 37, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille afin de protéger les enfants de l'Ontario.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated December 3, 2008, the bill is ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE
ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly and I move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 98, An Act to promote the sale of Ontario grown agricultural food products by amending the Municipal Act, 2001 and the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act / *Projet de loi 98, Loi visant à promouvoir la vente de produits agroalimentaires cultivés en Ontario en modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités et la Loi sur l'aménagement des voies publiques et des transports en commun, the title of which is amended to read, "Bill 98, An Act to promote the sale of Ontario produced agricultural products by amending the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act / *Projet de loi 98, Loi visant à promouvoir la vente de produits**

agricoles ontariens en modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement des voies publiques et des transports en commun."

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Oakville.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It feels like Groundhog Day, Speaker.

I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 124, An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act with respect to cigarillos / Projet de loi 124, Loi modifiant la Loi favorisant un Ontario sans fumée en ce qui a trait aux cigarillos.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated December 3, 2008, this bill and the previous bill are ordered for third reading.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY

Hon. Michael Chan: Today, the province of Ontario joins with nations and jurisdictions around the world to mark International Volunteer Day. In this spirit, I salute the more than five million Ontarians who share their valuable time and skills in communities across the province.

Volunteers contribute to every dimension of community life: social services, arts and culture, sports and recreation, the environment and faith communities. Right now, there may be a young person planning for a group of friends to clean up trash along the banks of a stream. Somewhere else, a senior is delivering library books to other seniors. Volunteers nurture the civic pride that is at the heart of every strong community and contribute more than 800 million hours annually. They strengthen Ontario as a whole.

The government recognizes Ontario's volunteers through several awards. The Volunteer Service Awards, for example, recognize people who volunteer their time to a single organization over a number of years, ranging from five to 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 and even 60 years. These volunteers are truly the bedrock of their organizations

and their communities. The June Callwood Outstanding Achievement Awards for Voluntarism are named for one of Ontario's best-known and well-loved volunteers and social activists.

I am really proud to say that the volunteer spirit lives in Ontario youth. Our young people have the highest rate of volunteering in Canada. They are truly ensuring the future of Ontario's proud volunteer tradition.

I had the opportunity this past April to assist the Lieutenant Governor in honouring 10 young men and women with an Ontario Medal for Young Volunteers. These medals were awarded in recognition of their outstanding volunteerism.

We had other great examples of youth volunteerism earlier this year. During National Volunteer Week last April, nearly 1,000 youth in seven pilot communities took part in Change the World: Ontario Youth Volunteer Challenge. We intend to build on this success by expanding the youth challenge next year to involve thousands of young volunteers in communities across the province. I will be counting on members of this House to help us make young people aware of the challenge and participate in the provincial traditions of volunteerism.

A strong province helps to ensure that all its residents are included in the life of society. This is why our government works with organizations to engage and recruit newcomers to volunteerism. When newcomers volunteer, they become part of the community. We are currently supporting pilot projects that are opening doors for more newcomers to volunteer. At the same time, we are creating welcoming and inclusive communities.

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As we observe International Volunteer Day, I encourage members of the Legislature to consider nominating people from their communities for volunteer awards and I ask my colleagues to join me in saluting one of Ontario's greatest treasures: our volunteers of all ages.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Statements? Responses?

INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY

Mr. Peter Shurman: Established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1985, International Volunteer Day is a commemoration of the dedication and endless contributions that volunteers make to societies around the globe. Each and every one of us has benefited from the work that volunteers do and, on December 5, it is our opportunity to say thank you.

Whether in schools, hospitals, police and fire services, churches, synagogues, mosques and temples, scouting organizations, Girl Guides and athletic clubs, volunteers contribute to a better quality of life for all Canadians and help create a shining example of a civil society.

The people whom we honour on International Volunteer Day also often leave their homes, their families and their country to bring hope, aid and relief to people in need in faraway corners of the world. They are faced with countless challenges, put themselves at risk, but

they persevere and help those who have been neglected, injured, abandoned or are ill. They provide much-needed education to children in places where schools are a luxury that is unaffordable. They lend a helping hand and deliver aid in refugee camps where thousands of people look for shelter, safety and sustenance. They show the depth and courage of the human spirit and they are an inspiration to all of us.

Our communities, our cities, our country and this world would not be what they are today without the hundreds of thousands of volunteers who give their time freely for the betterment of others. Canadian volunteers contribute about two billion volunteer hours annually. That's the equivalent of roughly one million full-time jobs. The Canada Survey for Giving, Volunteering and Participating tells us that about 45% of the Canadian population over the age of 15 contributes volunteer hours. Included in that are about five million Ontarians who contribute over 800 million annual volunteer hours, or the equivalent of over \$10 billion annually if they were paid. These numbers speak highly of the quality of kindness and compassion in our province and in Canada.

Most importantly, our youth have caught the volunteer bug. Young people are starting to give up their own time in order to help others. They have been taught by the example of older generations of Canadians who understand that to help a person in need brings a reward more meaningful and lasting than any sum of money or material benefits.

I appreciate the comments made by the minister, and I, as do the PC caucus and our leader John Tory, wish to extend my most heartfelt gratitude to the many Canadians who are tireless in their volunteer work and commitment to their communities.

INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY

Mr. Paul Miller: I don't have to read from a script this time, because I would like to commend the minister and my fellow colleague from the official opposition on their comments.

Volunteers are the heartbeat of my community. Anything from Little League baseball to hockey to hospitals to all these service groups—we've got anything from the Lions Club, Optimist Club, Kinsmen Club, Kiwanis, volunteers from all walks of life and all different parts of our society, from all different groups. It doesn't matter where you come from in our community or what group you are from, everybody chips in. And then—

Mr. Peter Kormos: It's the grandparents raising grandkids.

Mr. Paul Miller: Of course, our grandparents raising grandkids are another important part of our community.

I must say, the lists go on. I couldn't even begin to think about how many people in my community volunteer time. In every community in this province and everywhere in Canada, volunteers are the backbone of all our communities. These people are unsung heroes. They

give up countless hours of their personal time. They even give up financial means to help other people in our community.

Mr. Peter Kormos: It's because they lose their jobs—

Mr. Paul Miller: My colleague from Welland is chipping in here to help me out because he'd like to get his two cents in. I will leave you two minutes and you can do a little bit, Peter.

Anyway, all I'm saying, in closing, is there's nothing more to be said about volunteers. They're wonderful people. They're great organizations. They do great work for our communities. They help us immeasurably, and it saves our province probably hundreds of millions of dollars a year that would have to be put out to service these different causes. So hats off to the volunteers in our province and Canada.

I, too, concur with the minister and my colleague from the official opposition that these people are absolutely wonderful.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Indeed, in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, as workers continue to lose their jobs, more and more people are going to have an opportunity to spend their time volunteering.

But look, it may well be a time, from this government's point of view, to celebrate the contribution that volunteers make. Let's understand why there is an increasing reliance upon volunteers. That is because there is an increasing diminishment of services provided to people in need.

The people I know at the food banks down where I come from are volunteers, and people have to volunteer in those because this government's absence of commitment to anti-poverty programs forces food banks run by volunteers to exist. Thoppil Abraham, a psychiatrist in Welland, volunteers at the Hope Centre, dealing with people living in the greatest of despair and poverty and mental illness. He volunteers because this government won't provide adequate levels of mental health services and supports for people suffering mental illness or people enduring drug and other substance addictions or recovering from them.

So while we may stand here and make feel-good statements in an attempt to disguise the depths to which this province has plunged under the stewardship of Dalton McGuinty, let's understand that when we're celebrating volunteers, we're also celebrating—dare I say it—the contribution of people to mitigate the tragedy of others who have been victims of government policies that have abandoned the poor, government policies that have abandoned abused women, government policies that have abandoned seniors, government policies that abandoned people with mental illnesses, government policies that have abandoned children in dire straits who need supports.

I suppose if there had been a couple of volunteers in the Family Court down at 311 Jarvis when Katelynn Sampson was handed over to her murderers, there might have been somebody to prepare an assessment or an

opinion about the capacity of those proposed custodial parents to take her into their abattoir—it wasn't a home; it was an abattoir.

So you see, there are two sides to this coin. While I would love for us to be able to join hands and burn incense and talk about how great things are in this province, New Democrats understand that you can't. This government's effort to candy-coat an increasingly desperate situation in this province has reached the depths of despicable.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition from the good people of Milton:

"Whereas Milton District Hospital was designed to serve a population of 30,000 and the town of Milton is now home to more than 69,000 people and is still growing rapidly; and

"Whereas the town of Milton is the fastest-growing town in Canada and was forced into that rate of growth by an act of the Ontario Legislature called 'Places to Grow'; and

"Whereas the town of Milton is projected to have a population of 101,600 people in 2014, which is the earliest date an expansion could be completed; and

"Whereas the current Milton facility is too small to accommodate Milton's explosive growth and parts of the hospital prohibit the integration of new outpatient clinics and diagnostic technologies;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure timely approval and construction of the expansion to Milton District Hospital."

I approve this petition, I've signed my name to it and pass it to page Swapnil.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has launched a blatant attack on our province's grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren by cutting off access to the temporary care assistance program;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislature call on the minister to overturn her July 2008 directives outlining the temporary care assistance program and grant all grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren access to this much-needed financial support."

I agree with this petition and hereby affix my name.

1330

HOSPICES

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas hospices on church or hospital property do not pay taxes;

"Whereas hospices are not-for-profit organizations providing emotional, spiritual and bereavement support and respite care to terminally ill individuals and their family members;

"Whereas a residential hospice (usually an eight- to 10-bed home-like facility) provides around-the-clock care to terminally ill individuals and support to their families;

"Whereas hospice services are provided free of charge;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow hospices across the province to be exempt from municipal taxes."

I agree with this and will send this with Sahara to the table.

MOTORCYCLE SAFETY

Mr. Robert Bailey: This is a petition from my riding as well as across Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Bill 117, presented by MPP Helena Jaczek on October 27, 2008, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the driving and operation of motorcycles with child passengers, is amended by adding the following section:

"Prohibition of passengers under 14 years old on motorcycles;

"38.1 No person shall drive or operate a motorcycle on a highway if another person under the age of 14 years is a passenger on that motorcycle;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That Bill 117 be removed from their agenda and never become law."

I agree with that and affix my signature to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today from Theresa Darby, a hard-working volunteer in Mississauga, Ontario.

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures

that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I agree with this petition and give it to page Kush.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition from the good people of Oakville.

"Whereas the current Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital is fully utilized; and

"Whereas Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital was sized to serve a town of Oakville population of 130,000, and the current population is now well over 170,000; and

"Whereas the population of Oakville continues to grow as mandated by 'Places to Grow,' an act of the Ontario Legislature, and is projected to be 187,500 in 2012, the completion date for a new facility in the original time frame; and

"Whereas residents of the town of Oakville are entitled" to have access "to the same quality of health care as all Ontarians; and

"Whereas hospital facilities in the surrounding area do not have capacity to absorb Oakville's overflow needs;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure the new Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital be completed under its original timelines without further delay."

I'm in agreement with this petition and I'm pleased to sign my name to it and pass it to my page, Amanda.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Paul Miller: I rise with a petition. I'd like to assist my colleague from Mississauga-Streetsville.

"Western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I agree with this petition and affix my name to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I thank my colleague from Hamilton East. I would like to read the same petition myself, and I would like to thank Theresa Darby, who works at Credit Valley Hospital, for having collected the signatures.

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I would like very much to sign and support this petition and to ask my page, Jason Fernandes of Mississauga-Streetsville, to carry it for me.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Ms. Laurie Scott: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario is introducing a policy of forcing sole proprietors, partners, executive officers in a corporation and independent operators in construction to pay workers' compensation premiums on their own earnings in addition to the premiums they already pay on behalf of their employees; and

"Whereas such a policy will inflict an additional \$11,000 average cost on law-abiding business owners in the above-ground economy while doing nothing to root out the law-evading cheaters in the underground economy; and

"Whereas such a policy will not improve access to workplace health and safety education and training since law-abiding businesses already have access to all of these

resources and law-evading businesses will continue to hide; and

"Whereas such a policy is not needed to level the playing field, since the rules already require that firms large and small must cover employees, while company leaders are exempt in both cases; and

"Whereas there has been no serious review of alternatives such as tracking who has coverage by name to limit abuse and other insurance options; and

"Whereas such a policy could be extended beyond construction to other sectors; and

"Whereas Ontario's slowing economy is hurting citizens and businesses, also resulting in Ontario becoming a first-time 'have-not' province;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To vote against or repeal any legislation that requires independent operators, executive officers in a corporation, sole proprietors and partners in construction or in any other sector to pay WSIB premiums on their own earnings."

It was brought to me by my local CFIB, and I'm going to hand it to page Swapnil.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to join with my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora in this petition which is addressed to the Parliament of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

"Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada's multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

"Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario's diverse religious and cultural communities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the private member's bill" entitled "An Act to proclaim" April 2 "Pope John Paul II Day" in Ontario.

It contains the signatures of a number of people, primarily from the Polish community, and some from my own community. I'm pleased to sign and support it and to send it down with page Brittny.

UNIVERSITY LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Peter Shurman: I have a petition from students at York University.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the strike by CUPE Local 3903 at York University has resulted in classes being cancelled, affecting more than 50,000 students across the greater Toronto area; and

"Whereas the members of CUPE Local 3903 show an unwillingness to bargain in good faith and bring an end to this strike; and

"Whereas York University has offered to resolve this labour dispute through binding arbitration;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Enact back-to-work legislation requiring the termination of any strike or lockout action and requiring this labour dispute to be resolved through binding arbitration."

I fully support this petition, affix my name to it and give it to the page Jenna.

1340

LUPUS

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to read this petition on behalf of my hard-working seatmate, the member for Niagara Falls. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no new safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

This contains the signatures of a number of people from Toronto, Etobicoke and, of course, Niagara Falls. I'm pleased to sign it and once again ask my page, Jason Fernandes, to carry it.

BEER RETAILING AND DISTRIBUTION

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario; this petition has been signed by tens of thousands of people.

"Whereas the current system, practice and arrangement of retailing and distributing beer in the province of Ontario—and more specifically, the 'near monopoly' of The Beer Store—severely restricts the accessibility, convenience and choice for retail consumers of beer in Ontario; and

"Whereas The Beer Store 'near monopoly' is controlled by 'for-profit, foreign-owned companies' and these companies are not accountable to the people of Ontario, and these companies do not act in the best interests of the people of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That legislation be introduced that will permit the retailing and distribution of beer through alternative and additional grocery and supermarket retail channels that will fairly compete with The Beer Store, thereby allowing an accessible, convenient, safe, well-regulated and environmentally responsible retailing environment for beer to become established in the province of Ontario."

I agree with the petition, sign my name to it and pass it to our page Luis.

BATHURST HEIGHTS ADULT LEARNING CENTRE

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition to save the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there are over 2,000 adult ESL students being served by the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre, operated by the Toronto District School Board, in partnership with the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas this is the only English as a second language (ESL) learning centre in this area of the city located directly on the Spadina subway line ...

"Whereas newcomers in Toronto, and in the Lawrence Heights area, need the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre so they can succeed in their" future jobs and careers; and

"Whereas the proposed revitalization of Lawrence Heights threatens the existence of the centre;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, demand" and ask "that any revitalization of Lawrence Heights include a newcomer centre and ensure that the Bathurst Heights centre continues to exist in the present location."

I support the petition and affix my name to it.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (CHILD PASSENGERS ON MOTORCYCLES), 2008 LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (ENFANTS PASSAGERS SUR DES MOTOCYCLETES)

Ms. Jaczek moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 117, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the driving and operation of motorcycles with

child passengers / Projet de loi 117, Loi modifiant le Code de la route afin d'interdire la conduite et l'utilisation de motocyclettes transportant des enfants comme passagers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm pleased to rise in the House today for second reading of my private member's Bill 117 to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the driving and operation of motorcycles with child passengers. The purpose of this bill is to protect children from preventable injury and thereby promote safety on Ontario's roads.

I have received many endorsements of this bill. Among these, we have with us today in the west members' gallery, Brian Patterson, of the Ontario Safety League; Patrick Brown, president, Ontario Trial Lawyers Association; and Katie Mellor and Nigel Finan, representatives of concerned parents who support this bill. In the Speaker's gallery we are also joined by Lynda Staples, of the Canadian Paraplegic Association Ontario. I'd like to thank my staff, Valerie Dixon, Frank Belluardo and legislative intern Rosanne Waters for their hard work on this bill.

As a family physician working in the emergency room, one of the most tragic cases I ever saw was a boy of about 10 who had been run over by a car. He was conscious and in extreme pain as we removed his clothes to examine his torso, where the tire marks were clearly visible and had done severe damage to his internal organs. Happily, he survived after emergency surgery, but it is an image I will never forget.

As a former medical officer of health in this province, I took my responsibility to administer the injury prevention program of the Health Protection and Promotion Act very seriously. Now, as an elected member of this Legislative Assembly, I believe one of our prime duties is to enact legislation that protects the most vulnerable members of our society. This, of course, includes our children, who, through lack of physical development or mature judgment, are exposed to harm.

Before I detail some of the harm that can be done to children riding as passengers on motorcycles, I would like to explain what this bill is not about. It is not about questioning the love that those parents who have ridden motorcycles with their children as passengers have for their own precious children. In fact, I'm sure that the vast majority of those parents have thought about and implemented a number of safety mechanisms that they feel will protect their kids. However, unfortunately, the numbers speak for themselves. Children are being hurt, and seriously.

According to the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario's road safety reports, from 1995 to 2005, a total of 199 motorcycle passengers aged zero to 15 years of age sustained injuries. Since then, however, SmartRisk, an organization that compiles injury data, has noted that in the fiscal year 2005-06, of those hospitalized in Ontario

due to serious motorcycle-related injuries, eight were aged five to nine and 38 were between the ages of 10 and 14, for a total of 46. Furthermore, of the emergency department visits in 2005-06 for motorcycle-related injury, eight were aged zero to four years of age, 106 were between five and nine and 442 were aged 10 to 14. That is a total of 556 injured children in one year in Ontario.

These numbers would also seem to indicate that injuries are increasing. It is important to know that riding on a motorcycle is more dangerous than driving in a car. The US National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has found that, per vehicle mile travelled, in 2006 motorcyclists were 35 times more likely than passenger car occupants to die, and eight times more likely to be injured. While it has been pointed out to me by some that there are more injuries to children from other types of activities, I simply must say, for the family of that child injured while a passenger on a motorcycle, the impact is 100%.

Certainly, the risk is sufficient for Pamela Fuselli, executive director of Safe Kids Canada, which is the national injury prevention program of the Hospital for Sick Children, to say: "On behalf of Safe Kids Canada, I would like to extend our organizational support for your private member's Bill 117.... The amendments you propose to the HTA through Bill 117 represent an important component of injury prevention best practice, which will prove beneficial to improving the safety of Ontario's roads and highways." Her words are echoed by officials from the Ontario Brain Injury Association, the Canadian Paraplegic Association Ontario and the St. John Council for Ontario.

What does the current legislation require in terms of safety measures? No Canadian province currently sets a minimum age for motorcycle passengers, although four states in the USA have varying restrictions up to the age of eight. However, MTO does not recommend children as passengers on motorcycles until they are old enough and strong enough to understand that they need to hold on and are able to negotiate turns with the driver. Through regulation in Ontario, a helmet and ability to reach the footrests are requirements for all passengers on motorcycles. Ontario does have voluntary driver training that includes an emphasis on safety. However, child passengers are still getting hurt, even though most Ontario motorcycle riders are well trained. Even the most diligent motorcycle rider can be involved in an accident, and the helpless child passenger is very likely to be injured.

1350

Here's a quote from an online article from motorcyclecruiser.com, by concerned parent and experienced motorcyclist Art Friedman:

"Here's a typical disaster in the making, one that I've seen far too frequently. A motorcyclist rides down the street with a kid sitting in front of him, a helmet four sizes too large bouncing around on the child's head, its little hands trying to hold on to the gas tank or the rider's legs. The kid interferes with the rider's control of the

bike, the first strike against them. What's going to happen if the rider must stop quickly? Will he grab the child with one arm, and thereby probably lose control of the bike if he really has to panic stop, or will he keep control of the bike and watch the kid fly off the front of the bike? Neither option bodes well for the child."

He goes on to say: "So he or she will sit behind you. That raises the issue of control. A child, especially a small one, can simply fall off. Even an older kid can fall asleep on a longer ride. Mine do, all the time. Any child can be flicked off in a brake-skid-stick situation or just a quick avoidance manoeuvre. Holding onto the rider can be difficult for small hands and short arms. My research uncovered an alarming number of instances when a child fell or was ejected from a motorcycle that didn't crash, often with horrifying results."

The author goes on to talk about the child's CRV riding belt that involves a harness that secures the child to the driver. He concedes that in a crash, "the child would be attached to you, which might cause additional injury if they ended up between you and whatever you bounced against."

Although Mr. Friedman concludes his article by saying he believes children can safely be passengers with proper preparation, I must disagree. Many riders will not go through the elaborate preparation of training, clothing, including proper-sized helmets and gloves, eye protection, hand holds and harnesses that he recommends for their child passengers. There is too much risk with these complicated voluntary measures.

And Don Forgeron, vice president-Ontario, Insurance Bureau of Canada, agrees. He wrote to me saying: "I would like to take this opportunity to offer our support for Bill 117.... Children are amongst the most vulnerable road users. In the case of motorcycles, many have not yet developed the strength to hold to the rider of the motorcycle.... Insurance Bureau of Canada, as a responsible stakeholder in the promotion of road safety, continues to support initiatives that make Ontario roads safer for all users."

People asked me why Bill 117 proposes the age limit as under 14. First, 14 is the age by which children typically reach their adult height. Also, there's current Ontario legislation which applies to the age of 14, such as going to the movies and working at a first part-time job—activities that require a certain level of maturity and judgment. As Linda Stewart, executive director of the Ontario Association of Local Public Health Agencies—or ALPHA—notes in that organization's letter of support, "We agree that the risk to passengers under the age of 14 is likely magnified by factors such as inexperience and strength, that child passengers are less likely to be fully aware of the excessive risk inherent in riding a motorcycle, and that they are less likely to fully appreciate the increased awareness and concentration required of both passengers and operators."

Ontario has a proud history of being a leader in road safety legislation. In 1976, Ontario made wearing seatbelts mandatory and became the first jurisdiction in

North America to do so. Through the years, additional measures have been taken to protect children, from child seat safety and mandatory booster seats, to safer school buses. However, as Brian Patterson, president of the Ontario Safety League, notes: "As with all safety initiatives we are confident that many will stand in opposition to our mutual position.... The same arguments were raised with respect to seatbelts, child car seats, better driver education and extreme driving enforcement. All of these initiatives are now universally accepted as life-saving and have played a significant role in ensuring that Ontario has the safest roads in North America."

Let Ontario be a leader again by our sending this bill to committee for further debate. I know that there is interest from members of this assembly in this matter. Our colleague from Newmarket–Aurora, a former Minister of Transportation, made a statement in this House on October 30, 2008, requesting the current Minister of Transportation to include, among other items, the following in a bill: "To make it illegal for children under the age of 12 to ride as passengers on motorcycles, thereby reducing the risk of serious injury or death."

As Patrick Brown of the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association wrote to say, "We believe that this bill will eliminate serious and debilitating injuries to children, not to mention the horrific loss to society when a young child is killed."

On behalf of Katie Mellor and Nigel and all those concerned with an undeniably unnecessary risk to vulnerable children, I ask for the support of all in this House to do the right thing and protect them by passing second reading of Bill 117.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to rise in support of the bill that is under debate. The member for Oak Ridges–Markham has brought forward a bill which I believe just makes good common sense.

Now, that is perhaps strange for some members here, because they have heard me time and again argue against much of what I've referred to as the nanny state legislation that this government brings forward from time to time. No doubt there will be colleagues arguing here today that the last thing we need is for government to provide yet one more not-to-do list for the citizens of Ontario.

As a former motorcycle rider, I sold my Harley-Davidson just two years ago. I've been a rider since age 17. I can tell you that in the entire time, as much as I enjoyed getting onto my motorcycle and taking it for a ride through the countryside—I can also on numerous occasions still experience the rush, the fear, of the near miss. I have two children; my daughter is now 30 and my son is 26. At no time when I was the owner of a motorcycle would it ever have crossed my mind to put my small child on the back of the motorcycle. The reason is that it's one thing for me to take the risk that comes with riding a motorcycle; it's yet something totally different for me to take my young child and place that child into present danger.

What we do know is this: When a motorcycle is in a crash, for the individual on that motorcycle, be it the one who is doing the driving of that motorcycle or the passenger, the chance of serious injury is considerably greater than if a crash takes place in a car. It's just common sense.

The member for Oak Ridges–Markham has done an excellent job of setting the context in terms of providing statistics and in terms of providing technical support for this legislation, so I won't go there. What I will say is that, contrary to what I would typically do with legislation when government tries to tell us how to live our lives, in this particular case I really believe there is a role for legislators; there is a role for the law to protect those who cannot protect themselves.

I will be the first one to admit that, yes, I have had many e-mails and phone calls in my office from a very organized lobby group who are asking me and have asked me to vote against this, and they've given us the reason. No doubt I have lost some votes, but I'm prepared to do that, because at the end of the day, what I do on this legislation here today is something I have to live with. If we can save the life of one child, if we can save one child the injury that may well be incurred as a result of a crash, then we've done our job.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: As the New Democratic Party justice critic, I stand in opposition to this legislation. Let me tell you why.

The arguments of protecting people against harm can evolve into *reductio ad absurdum*. Yes, a motorcyclist is more vulnerable in the event of an accident, because there is no cage around him or her, than is a person in a car. But I put to you that you in your tiny little cheap Toyota Tercel are far more vulnerable than I am in my Chevy pickup truck in the event of an accident.

1400

If we want to protect children from harm, well then let's protect them from all harm and all motor vehicle accidents. Let's prohibit children under 14 from being passengers in motor vehicles. Now this is silliness. But of course, it's also an accurate response to the argument that is being made.

There is already inherent in the Highway Traffic Act restrictions on who can be a passenger on a motorcycle. The passenger has to be physically large enough such that their feet ride the rear pegs. I appreciate that there's some weakness in regulation 610 with respect to safety helmets, because while the regulations require an approved safety helmet—and there are rigid standards about what constitutes an appropriate motorcycle safety helmet—there don't appear to be strict standards on the requirement that they fit. Look, I am not about to dispute the observations by the author of this bill or anybody else. There will inevitably be the scofflaw who's going to put a person as a passenger on a motorcycle with an oversized helmet.

Like Mr. Klees, I have had the occasion to drive a couple of motorcycles. Unlike him, I had the occasion to

be a passenger—because I've been involved with motorcycles all my life. I had the occasion to be a passenger on one many, many times as a 12-year-old, a 13-year-old, a 14-year-old and so on.

Look, I like motorcycles; I confess. I also like bikers. I find them to be incredibly open-minded, free-spirited people, adventurous and tolerant. I have so many good friends in the Welland County Motorcycle Club. I'm blessed to be there on an annual basis with their awards banquet, and I know them in so many other respects in the community. I also know them to be the most safety-conscious people on the road.

The motorcyclists I know are far more cautious than most of the automobile drivers I know, because they know that in the event that they get mowed down by a drunk or reckless or careless driver, their risk is higher. The motorcyclists I know use all the safety precautions in the world. The motorcyclists I know, know that it's important, for instance, for a motorcycle to be loud enough so that people enclosed in their cocoon of an automobile, playing their stereo cranked up—and again, a motorcyclist doesn't have much chance with that driver, does she or he?—hoping that they can hear that motorcycle when it approaches.

I also know motorcycling is a sport. Folks down at the Welland County Motorcycle Club—Wes Pierce, I've known him all my life, and Randy Doane, the new president. The event is one of the largest sporting activities in Niagara region, stretching over into Niagara frontier. The mini-bike operators are operating mini-bikes out on the track at the ages of five, six and seven years old, and they're being taught safety standards that, I tell you, one rarely finds let's say in traditional automobile licensing driver training. Then I attend awards banquets and watch motocross races down at the Welland County Motorcycle Club. Again, it's attracting young people. It's a tremendous sport. It's a family sport. It's a healthy sport. It's outdoors. It's a camaraderie that is outstanding and exceptional. Quite frankly, I would hope that most parents would far sooner see their kids out there racing motocross than hanging around the mall. There are skilled motocross champions at the ages of 10, 11, 12, and 13 years, and these are youngsters who have developed some great motorcycling skills, who are driving bikes that are the appropriate size and who are wearing helmets and other safety equipment that's of the appropriate standard and fits such that it constitutes a real safety standard.

I had a talk just today with Randy Clare from Clare's Cycle and Sports down on Highway 20 in Fenwick, and they've got the new Harley dealership up in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Johnny Clare, his father, is semi-retired now, but, as a matter of fact, up at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Clare's Harley Davidson—fantastic—this Saturday is their Christmas open house until 3 p.m. So if you want to take a look at some Harleys and talk to motorcycle enthusiasts, by all means, go to Clare's Harley up in Niagara-on-the-Lake this Saturday.

Johnny Clare, heck, he's well into his retirement years. They've been operating Clare's Cycle and Sports

since about 1951. Johnny Clare is an active supporter of motorcycling and so many other activities in the community, but he shakes his head in response to propositions like this. He shakes his head.

Whether the—I'm sure at this point—obsolete and totally invalid and inaccurate perception of bikers helps bring people to this point, I don't know it. I'm not going to suggest by any stretch of the imagination that it does.

You want to create safer circumstances for people on motorcycles? Then start enforcing the Highway Traffic Act on our major highways so that automobile drivers who zip in and out and are oblivious to what's going on beside them or behind them and, more often than not, what's in front of them, aren't putting motorcyclists in danger by their driving practices.

But understand that if you want to ensure that people under 16, or in this case, under 14, are wearing appropriate helmets, the government doesn't even need legislation to do this. Amend regulation 610 to ensure that the helmet being worn by a passenger, as well as the helmet being worn by the operator, is one that not only meets all the DOT standards etc., but is also one that's sized and fitted appropriately in the same way we demand people wear seat belts appropriately. There are still some clowns that drive around with the shoulder belt tucked under their arm. Well, that's a violation; that's an improper wearing of the seat belt; you're effectively not wearing it.

Understand that most passengers on motorcycles who are youthful are the sons and daughters or granddaughters and grandsons or nephews and nieces of the people operating that motorcycle. My colleague talks about the rush of driving recklessly and the near miss. Well, thank goodness—if his good judgment didn't prevail then, it will at least prevail to the point where he wouldn't submit his children to that. I'm serious.

But the motorcyclists I know wouldn't think of doing stunts with their kid on the back of the bike. Do you think a motorcyclist is going to do wheelies with their kid on the back? Of course not. No more so than Mr. Klees would have; not by any stretch of the imagination.

I had an interesting talk with Peter Salter. He happens to live in Welland. The Canadian Vintage Motorcycle Group is a group of guys and gals that restore and collect old bikes, World War II and pre-World War II bikes. Again, he just shakes his head. What is going on? Not a single jurisdiction in Canada embraces this. The United Kingdom adopts basically the same standard that we have now, and that is that a passenger has to be able to reach the foot pegs and be able to be accommodated on the bike. In the American jurisdictions, they're talking about five-year-olds. No five-year-old's feet are going to hit those pegs. It's *prima facie* illegal to put a five-year-old on a bike. You don't need new legislation.

1410

I put this to you: If a licensed adult operator of a motorcycle, or an unlicensed operator for that matter, is putting a passenger at risk, regardless of their age, and harm ensues, I have no qualms about that person being

prosecuted for, let's say, criminal negligence causing bodily harm or criminal negligence causing death. Quite frankly, if a motorcycle operator were to be driving in such a way that she or he put their passenger at risk, regardless of the age of the passenger, and were to be driving negligently and caused bodily harm, they probably would be found guilty of criminal negligence causing bodily harm, just like the operator of any other vehicle would. I have no qualms about standing alone in this Legislature. I have done it before, and I suspect, before I'm either sent out of here by the voters or carried out of here by whomever, I'll do it again.

I just find it incredible. This is the companion to Bill 126, the one with the ban, the section about how many teenagers fit into a Volkswagen. This is the companion to telling a youthful driver, regardless of how competent that youthful driver is, that she or he can't carry more than one schoolmate to a football game or a church meeting.

No. This legislation shouldn't pass. There are other, more thoughtful and more thorough ways to address highway safety, including motorcycle safety, and motorcyclists would be the first to tell you how to do it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm pleased that I've been given time to comment on the private member's bill brought forward by my colleague the member from Oakridges-Markham.

I know that we talk about safety. I've been listening to many speakers in this House who spoke about safety. The most important thing for all of us in the province of Ontario is to protect our children.

The most important thing is that this bill is brought forward by a doctor, by a physician who practised for many years, a person who knows the medical system very well, who has been exposed to many different tragedies and accidents, and who has dealt with many different issues concerning the safety of children.

I was listening when she was speaking about the reasons for passing the bill. She spoke about bikers. Definitely this bill is not against bikers, as she mentioned. I know that the biker community does an excellent job on behalf of all of us in the province of Ontario. They do a lot of charitable work for children, adults, seniors and disabled people. I know that many of my friends who own motorcycles love to do it. They develop a habit and a way to gather and socialize.

The most important thing in this bill is how we can protect our children. I was listening to the member from Welland speak about passing this bill in order to protect the children. We have to talk about it here. We can amend it without going back to the legislation, and just do some kind of technical exercise on the Highway Traffic Act; we can protect the children. But the most important thing from this bill is to bring awareness to all the people who are listening to us, who are attending with us and who participate with us in this debate. We always talk, but the most important thing is that we have to act.

We have to act, not just by wishing, but by changing laws and regulations, and putting them in place in order to protect our children.

I know that many bikers are cautious about this issue. I know they are not going to put their children or loved ones in danger. But sometimes you make rules and laws just to protect those few who do not respect the law, who are not able to implement their wishes and ideas. I think it's important for all of us in this place to continue to work together to create a safety mechanism to protect our children and also educate people across the province about how important it is to protect our children in general. I know, by passage of this bill, we are going to create safety mechanisms for all bikers to follow one rule, one law, in order to save the people of this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: First of all, my colleague for Oak Ridges-Markham is proposing a solution to a problem that just doesn't exist. It's not my quote; that's coming from the Canada Safety Council in a letter. The CSC does not see any cause for the restrictions that she proposes for motorcycle passengers and has found no statistical evidence that would merit these restrictions.

What is the motivation of the proposal, then? If you ask me, the member for Oak Ridges-Markham has overdosed on the Liberal nanny-statist Kool-Aid and is suffering from the father-knows-best hangover that ails her party and stems right down from Premier Dalton McGuinty, a.k.a. Big Daddy. Another ban—kill me now.

If the member had bothered to research the opinions of stakeholders in the area of motorcycling safety she would have found that she does not know best. Furthermore, bills like the one that we're debating today convince me that we are dealing with more than an addiction to bans. I think a better term for these ban-happy Liberals is legislative hypochondriacs: Not only is their solution to every problem a ban, but they're now introducing bans to resolve problems that aren't there. You want to regulate motorized two-wheel vehicles? Then what you do is you go after what's going on off-road, not what's going on on the road.

The Motorcycle and Moped Industry Council does not support Bill 117 because "it is not based on sound research or on scientific data. Statistics do not indicate the need for such a measure."

I look back in my own family history to my brother, the owner of two Harleys. He has been a motorcyclist for the past 40 years of his life, has three kids, and he's 55 years old. Both of those motorcycles are treated as well as his kids in the sense that they look like they came out of the showroom yesterday. That's what motorcyclists are about, including some of our people in the gallery from my constituency of Thornhill who have beseeched me to speak against this—and they didn't have to beseech very hard, because that's what I believe.

In my brother's family there was a rite of passage that involved becoming not old enough, but large enough to

sit astride one of these metal beasts and join their dad, my brother, on one of his many cross-country trips: from here to Vancouver, from here down to Mexico in one case, back and forth across the United States, through the mountains, through the valleys, seeing—can you imagine seeing the countryside that way with your dad? And, no, there has never been an accident. His oldest son, now 30-plus, has a Harley-Davidson of his own. These are responsible bikers.

The Canada Safety Council says that children in Ontario are four times as likely to have been injured as passengers on bicycles than on motorcycles and 262 times as likely to suffer injuries as a passenger in a passenger vehicle than on a motorcycle. So I am assuming that the members opposite who support this are not going to start banning passengers in cars, are they?

The province already has legislation that outlines safety precautions. The Highway Traffic Act requires that motorcycle passengers be able to sit astride and rest their feet on the footrests, as mentioned by my friend the member from Welland. You have to be able to fit the bike. It's not about age, it's about size. It says you have to reach the pegs and it says you have to be 16. So why are we wasting time on this?

From the statistical information that's available to us from the opinions of stakeholders such as the Canada Safety Council, the Motorcycle and Moped Industry Council and the Motorcycle Safety Foundation, it appears that the current legislative requirements are working to ensure the safety of young motorcycle passengers. So introducing a ban on children under 14 riding as passengers on motorcycles accomplishes nothing other than cutting yet another family activity from the lives of Ontarians.

1420

There are a couple of other points that need some underscoring.

It puts a portion of our tourism industry at risk. It attracts people to this lovely province, so are we talking about deterring visitors from other provinces and the United States, people who are doing what I've described my brother having done with his family, doing it safely and avoiding accidents and teaching their children well what it means to sit astride one of these amazing machines that can cause damage but that when used properly are no less safe than anything else—and if they were, why wouldn't we be banning motorcycles? Let me not put that idea in anyone's mind.

The people in the gallery today also happen to be people who take their children on rides on motorcycles. They want to be able to continue to do so.

Let me conclude by saying that being trigger-happy is not the way to go. "Ban first, ask later" attempts to regulate every aspect of the lives of Ontario families, whether necessary or not, are not something that I like to see. I've spoken out against them before, and that's why I won't be supporting this bill today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: It's a privilege to speak in support of my colleague Dr. Helena Jaczek of Oak Ridges–Markham.

I appreciate the fact that the MPP from Thornhill, Mr. Shurman, is an excellent ambassador for his views, but I would have expected somewhat more diplomatic language coming from him.

I also detect that there seems to be a little bit of a disconnect within the Tory regime here, as well as perhaps in Ottawa, with regard to a former Minister of Transportation, the honourable Frank Klees, in complete support of this particular bill.

I'd also just like to note for the record that it's very heartwarming for me to see that Dr. Helena Jaczek, MPP for Oak Ridges–Markham, and Frank Klees, a former Minister of Transportation and the MPP for Newmarket–Aurora, former opponents of each other for the same riding, are now able to display a new spirit of co-operation and coalition. I would encourage other members of that caucus—and broadly, across the country—to do so.

Of course, we always have the well-staged theatrical remarks of the MPP from Welland, Mr. Kormos. He is often offering us what I would call "Kormotic" repartee, as a lawyer. Of course, we agree together that there's no shortage of lawyers and this Legislature can always use more lawyers. I would never disagree with that. But I do think it's exceptionally important to realize that this particular bill is being brought forward by a very well-versed physician who has had long experience with viewing the other side of this, the injured parties.

As well, our MPP colleague from Welland, in his usual theatrical style, used the phrase "*reductio ad absurdum*" to reduce the opponent's arguments to the level of absurdity. But I have to say that it was he and he alone who provided the absurdity to the arguments; for example, saying that somehow this is equivalent to banning children from cars. He is saying that this bill is equivalent to attacking the nation of bikers, somehow equating all children who may ride on motorcycles with skilled, trained motocross drivers, and saying that the relationship of the driver and passenger, meaning father-son or grandmother-granddaughter, somehow confers an added level of safety in the view of an accident.

I really have to say that what this bill is all about, le projet de loi modifie le code de la route afin d'interdire la conduite ou l'utilisation d'une motocyclette transportant un passager de moins de 14 ans sur une voie publique.

I think this is essentially part and parcel of, yes, a fairly long and noble history of legislation working toward public safety, whether it's seat belts or helmets or perhaps the imminent removal of the possibility of using hand-held cellphones while driving an automobile etc. Those of us on the front lines, as doctors who have seen the other side of this, who have seen individuals whose youth has literally been robbed from them because of, yes, of course, loving parents and well-intentioned, duly licensed, trained drivers, through really no fault of their own—subjecting people inadvertently, by accident, to some extraordinary, extraordinary injuries.

The MPP from Welland did legitimately raise the fact that there's an absence of a "cage" in the motorcycle situation. That, of course, offers extraordinary trauma to brain, to heart, to internal organs.

This is really an attempt, I think, by my honourable colleague physician Dr. Jaczek, MPP from Oak Ridges–Markham, to remedy the current state.

I would of course join with the new spirit of coalition and co-operation coming from former opponents, the MPP from Oak Ridges–Markham and the MPP from Newmarket–Aurora, in supporting this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to add a few comments in the few minutes I have left on Bill 117, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the driving and operation of motorcycles with child passengers. I'm sure the member from Oak Ridges–Markham has good intentions and concerns in bringing this bill forward, but I did want to get on the record my strong opposition to the bill.

First of all, we already have sufficient rules on the books to do with younger passengers. In regard to the size of the passenger, the passenger has to be large enough that their feet can be firmly on the pegs of the motorcycle. I think that's what makes sense in terms of providing the security of that passenger.

I would simply like to say that government cannot legislate away all the risk we face in the world. What this will do is deprive a lot of parents and grandparents and kids of the opportunity of enjoying the sport of motorcycling and time spent together. I would suggest to members to read the Toronto Star article written by Mark Richardson on avoiding a nanny state, which points out, "Nowhere else in North America does such a law exist." It goes on to say: "We have to be sure that what we do makes sense to the citizen; otherwise, the citizen is going to lose faith in the system. We're going to start making a lawbreaker out of every citizen."

I would like to, in the short couple of minutes I have, get on the record some of the e-mails that I've received from constituents in Parry Sound–Muskoka.

I received an e-mail from Blair Hickey in Bracebridge. He quotes the Canada Safety Council: "It is the CSC's position that there is no statistical evidence to support this legislation." I reviewed all seven Ontario Road Safety Annual Reports from 1999 to 2005. I did not find any fatalities for motorcycle passengers less than 14 years of age. I also looked at injuries for motorcycle passengers less than 16 years of age and compared them to bicycle passengers less than 16 years of age and car passengers less than 16 years of age, over the same period (1999 to 2005). Ontarian children were four times more likely to have been injured as passengers on bicycles and 262 times more likely to have been injured as passengers in passenger vehicles than to have been injured as passengers on motorcycles."

I simply make the point that we cannot legislate against all the risk there is in the world. I do have a

conflict in that I enjoy motorcycling myself—I have a Yamaha FZ1—and I do a few other things in life that involve a little bit of risk. But I say that the great majority of people out there will have some common sense, and parental responsibility will kick in.

I received an e-mail from Philip Goldsmith. He says, "Let's consider danger. Do we keep kids off bicycles as, even with helmets, there are many accidents and injuries a year, especially in our major cities? Do we stop people boating as a few children every year drown? I took my children canoeing and camping in the bush. Was I an irresponsible parent? Do we stop them sailing in open water? I took them sailing with me since they have been young. Do we stop them from hiking in the forests of our vast country? A few children a year fall from trees or are attacked by animals."

I think he makes a good point, that we just cannot legislate against all risk. We have to allow some common sense to occur.

I see this bill as being a nanny state type of bill, where we're trying to make rules for problems that don't exist, and Big Brother, the government, knows best.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'm pleased to stand in this Legislature and support my colleague from Oak Ridges–Markham and make a few statements on the merits of this bill, Bill 117, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the driving and operation of motorcycles and child passengers.

This is just another means of protecting the children of Ontario, children who in some cases may not be able to make an informed decision on their own safety. I believe it is important that this House support this bill. On behalf of these children, we should be doing the right thing.

1430

Everyone who has spoken so far has talked about the responsible operator of a motorcycle etc. What we fail to add to the debate is, a person can be on that motorcycle on the highway, but they have to realize that there are four other vehicles, maybe more, around them, and they can't speak for the safety of the other drivers on the highway.

What we don't need is that one accident that may not cause a fatality—but I think the most important one and the tragic one is if it leaves a child with a lifelong injury and that person becomes a problem and a responsibility of society. That responsible parent who was taking them along on a motorcycle may not be around when this child is in their elderly state—and has left them with this injury that has affected their whole lifestyle.

I just want to read parts of a letter by Katherine Mellor. Katherine is in the gallery today. She wrote this letter back in June 2008 to Minister Bradley, as a parent.

She says:

"In my daily parenting plight, I have recently had a new situation cross my path, which has served to be both alarming and perplexing.

"To make a long story as concise as possible, my soon to be ex-husband has decided, to my chagrin, that my son

Liam (8 years of age) should be a regular passenger on his motorcycle."

To her dismay, she found that the "only two requirements the Ministry of Transportation in Ontario have are that any passengers need to wear a helmet with a chin-strap, and their feet must touch the footrests. I would like to add that depending on the motorcycle the footrests could be quite high, meaning; even a very small child of 3-5 years of age could potentially be a passenger!..."

"The bottom line is that children under the age of at least 12 do not truly grasp the ramifications of riding as a passenger on a motorcycle."

She goes on to say:

"Ontario likes to lead the way with respect to how we protect our children, and the current and past governments have done an effective job when necessary to amend the Highway Traffic Act to ensure safety standards for our children.

"My request to you Minister Bradley, is that changes to the MTO rules and regulations regarding children as passengers on motorcycles be looked into immediately. Not just the next time the issue is up for review, as it might be too late for my son at that time."

One member went on to rant and rave about this particular legislation and how it's banning this and banning that. I'll bet you there were members of this Legislature who complained the same way in 1976 when the Legislature brought in, for the first time—as the first jurisdiction in North America to deal with seat belts in cars. I am sure that back then, everybody thought that they were safe drivers. But do you know what? That legislation was the start of many safety initiatives for drivers and passengers, and I hope we continue to bring them as we see fit.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Oak Ridges—Markham, Ms. Jaczek, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'd like to thank my colleagues from London—Fanshawe, Etobicoke North, Scarborough—Rouge River, Newmarket—Aurora, Welland, Thornhill and Parry Sound—Muskoka for their comments, which do in fact reflect public opinion, as I've heard it since first reading of this bill.

Denial of risk is a very common human reaction. In my career, I've seen young girls who thought they could never get pregnant and smokers who thought they were somehow magically protected from the dangers of tobacco. "It can never happen to me," unfortunately, is not reality.

In the case of child motorcycle passengers, the risk is real. The question is, is it an acceptable risk to impose on a child? In my view, it is not; it is an unnecessary risk.

As with all proposals for change, this bill has generated considerable discussion. I know that the vast majority of motorcycle riders understand the vulnerability of their passengers and take what steps they can to protect them. However, the facts speak for themselves: Children are being injured.

The major organizations in this province that are concerned with preventable injury, including the Hospital

for Sick Children; the Ontario Safety League; the Canadian Paraplegic Association, Ontario; the Ontario Brain Injury Association; the St. John Council; the Insurance Bureau of Canada; the Association of Local Public Health Agencies; many health units; and the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association, all support this bill—a most diverse group; very broad-based support—as do so many parents and grandparents and extended family of vulnerable children. They are all concerned for the health of our children.

It is time to address this issue in a fair and open-minded fashion in committee. I urge all members of this House to support Bill 117.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. For our guests in the gallery and those watching at home, we will vote on this ballot item standing in the name of Ms. Jaczek in 100 minutes. Orders of the day.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I move that, in the opinion of this House, a select committee should be established immediately to develop a comprehensive Ontario mental health and addictions strategy;

That, in developing its strategy and recommendations, the committee shall focus on the following issues:

—the urgent need for a comprehensive mental health strategy in Ontario to work in co-operation with the Mental Health Commission of Canada and to coordinate the delivery of mental health programs and services in Ontario;

—the lack of coordination in Ontario for the delivery of mental health programs and services across many provincial ministries;

—the mental health issues of children;

—the increase in suicide among young people;

—the mental health and/or addiction problems of homeless people;

—the mental health needs of residents of long-term-care facilities;

—the lack of access to even basic mental health services for aboriginal Canadians in many parts of Ontario; and

—the issues facing courts and police across Ontario in dealing with increasing numbers of alleged offenders with significant mental health and/or addiction problems;

That the committee shall have authority to conduct hearings and undertake research, and generally shall have such powers and duties as are required to develop recommendations on a comprehensive Ontario mental health and addictions strategy; and

That the committee shall present an interim report to the House no later than the end of 2009, and a final report no later than June 30, 2010.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mrs. Elliott, the member for Whitby—Oshawa, moves private members' notice of motion number 65.

Pursuant to standing order number 98, Mrs. Elliott, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm very grateful for the opportunity today to speak about the need for a comprehensive mental health strategy for Ontario. This is truly a non-partisan issue. I do appreciate the support that has been extended by Minister Caplan, by many government members and members of the third party, as well as by members of my own Progressive Conservative caucus.

We've all heard truly heartbreaking stories from constituents, over the years, who have struggled with mental illness and have been unable to access services. We've also heard from many of their family members who've been unable to access care for them when they've needed it. We know that the need is great, but despite the best efforts of many governments over the years, we have not succeeded in creating a comprehensive mental health service and system to serve the needs of Ontarians with mental health problems. I would suggest two principal reasons why this is so.

The first is the stigma that is still associated with mental illness. I would like to refer to the Kirby report in this respect, because it did deal extensively with the issue of stigma and commented on the fact that it is really preventing inclusionary provisions from happening in our society and is not allowing people to access mental health programs and services.

The Kirby report, in its foreword, did quote from More for the Mind, which was a study of psychiatric services in Canada undertaken by the Canadian Mental Health Association. It stated: "In no other field, except perhaps leprosy, has there been as much confusion, misdirection and discrimination against the patient, as in mental illness.... Down through the ages, they have been estranged by society and cast out to wander in the wilderness. Mental illness, even today, is all too often considered a crime to be punished, a sin to be expiated, a possessing demon to be exorcised, a disgrace to be hushed up, a personality weakness to be deplored or a welfare problem to be handled as cheaply as possible."

Even though those words were written nearly 50 years ago, I would suggest that the situation has not improved markedly to date.

Stigma prevents people from speaking about mental illness and from seeking treatment. It isolates and marginalizes people. It prevents many from seeking and maintaining meaningful employment, because they are fearful of dismissal. But it goes even further than that.

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As was noted by Carolyn Abraham, a medical reporter with the Globe and Mail, in their excellent, recent series on Canada's mental health crisis, the practice of psychiatry itself is "a specialty relegated to the basement." Psychiatry is seen by some members of the medical profession as a lesser science, and as Ms. Abraham noted, is contributing to a national shortage of psychiatrists and shoddy care for mentally ill people.

I would like to quote a little bit more from Ms. Abraham's article, because it so aptly describes the problem:

"'It's the patients who doubly suffer from the stigma', Dr. Shah said. 'First, from the social perception of their illness and then, on top of it all, from the shortage of treaters, and the gaps in care reflect the stigma within the medical profession and that contributes [to the social perception] ... so it's a vicious circle.'

"Studies suggest these attitudes take a toll on medicine's front lines: Mentally ill people have a tougher time finding a family doctor, are more likely to need urgent medical care and less likely to receive life-saving treatments. They're also more likely to die of conditions such as heart attacks, strokes and cancer.

"At the same time, funding for mental health research and psychiatric services has paled compared with monies doled out for physical ailments. Mental illness, meanwhile, is the number one cause of disabilities in Canada and accounts for 20% of all hospital admissions.

"The inequities are so apparent that the Mental Health Commission of Canada has made it a top priority to fight stigma among health care professionals, and this year the Canadian Medical Association, which represents the country's doctors, has launched a campaign to combat the stigma within its ranks."

So the stigma is pervasive and it's clearly going to take a concerted effort to eliminate it, something that the select committee is ideally positioned to deal with.

Secondly, mental health programs are many and varied and are delivered across many ministries besides the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. They include the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services and the Ministry of the Attorney General.

As you know, ministries tend to operate in a silo fashion with the result that various programs and services, as they're brought forward, don't necessarily mesh with the other programs and services that are being offered through other ministries. This was noted by Mr. Curling and Mr. McMurtry in their recent report on the roots of youth violence and one of their principal recommendations was a change in the governance structure to allow for cross-ministry communication. This was seen to be the key to success in dealing with youth violence. I would suggest this would apply to any action to be taken with respect to mental health issues as well. All of these issues can be explored by the committee members as they conduct their work over the course of 2009.

I am very pleased that the government has agreed not only with the establishment of the committee, but also with the timelines, because the need is great and it's becoming ever more urgent as our economic difficulties continue. As people struggle with financial pressures, the need for mental health services increases. We can see those needs in all aspects of our society. Children's mental health has been called "the orphan's orphan," with mental health being the orphan of our health care system, and children's mental health being the orphan of the mental health care system.

According to the Canadian Paediatric Society, mental illness among children is threatening to become the next pediatric epidemic. The pre-budget submission made by Children's Mental Health Ontario noted some startling statistics:

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15- to 19-year-olds, accounting for 24% of all deaths. It's exceeded only by death by accidents according to Statistics Canada.

Each year, on average, about 110 children and youth in Ontario commit suicide—more than two each week—again, according to statistics Canada.

Doctor visits for pediatric depression more than doubled from 1995 to 2002. In the Toronto District School Board, referrals for assessments for special education services, including speech and language and psychology, have risen 18.5% from 2001 to 2004—only three years.

By 2020, childhood neuro-psychiatric disorders will rise by more than 50% internationally to become one of the five most common causes of morbidity, mortality and disability among children.

But it's not just children's mental health needs that are increasing exponentially. Long-term-care facilities are being overwhelmed by the mental health needs of many of their residents. Aboriginal Canadians in many parts of Ontario lack access to even basic mental health programs and services. It's estimated that at least 30% to 40% of people who are homeless suffer from mental health and/or addiction problems. In fact, one of the first priorities for the Mental Health Commission of Canada is to study the issue and to establish demonstration research projects in six Canadian cities to combat homelessness.

Finally, I would like to speak briefly about the medical/legal issues surrounding mental illness. This was explored by Mr. André Picard in the excellent series on mental health issues featured in the *Globe and Mail* just recently. Events of recent weeks have also raised serious questions about our mental health laws. I would just like to comment on the nature of the problem that we're discussing here.

I am pleased to be joined by several experts on mental health issues here in the gallery today. First of all, Mr. Chris Bovie from the Whitby Mental Health Centre was here with us this morning, as well as Ms. Vani Jain, who is the manager of policy and community relations at the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario. I'm very pleased that they're here to join us because they have made some excellent comments on this issue.

I would just like to quote from Mr. Picard's article that really capsulizes the extent and nature of the problem: "Mental health services are in short supply, even for those who want care. But for those who refuse treatment, the situation can be dire and deadly. Many end up caught in the revolving door of the criminal justice system, their health—mental and physical—spiralling downward.

"Vani Jain, manager of policy and community relations at the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario, which runs the innovative justice and mental health program to sup-

port parents, says: 'The number one question we get here is, "How do I get help for my loved one who doesn't want it?"'

"There is no easy answer to that question, which pits people's civil rights against their health and the safety of others.

"John Gray, a psychologist and co-author of the legal text *Canadian Mental Health Law and Policy*, says that decades ago, people with mental health problems were hospitalized indiscriminately and often treated in a horrific fashion.

"As the Dickensian institutions were shut down, the pendulum swung to a point where civil rights ruled and involuntary hospitalization and treatment were next to impossible. Only those who posed an imminent danger to others could be held and treated, and an army of untreated people took to the streets and soon found themselves sleeping on cold slabs in prison. 'The fundamental problem is that we've deinstitutionalized the mental-health system, but we haven't deinstitutionalized mental health law,' Mr. Gray says.

"In his view, British Columbia has the country's best mental health legislation because it balances the rights and needs of people with severe psychiatric problems, and heeds the interests of families. People can be hospitalized involuntarily if they pose a danger to themselves or others—the traditional criteria—but also if their mental health risks deteriorated markedly without care.

"'The purpose of the BC law is to treat people who are sick, not punish them,' Mr. Gray says. 'That's what you want.'

"At the other end of the spectrum, he says, is Ontario, where it can be difficult to commit and treat people, even if they are very sick."

That is indeed a problem that we are facing here in Ontario, and we can look at the events of recent weeks to see what has happened there, looking most recently at the situation of Mr. Steven Chau, who was recently found by an Ontario court to be not criminally responsible for the deaths of his wife and two children because of his mental illness at the time. This is despite the devoted efforts of his family to seek treatment for him when it became apparent that his mental illness was spiralling downward in the few weeks preceding the murders. That's why Mr. Chau and his family had asked for the Ontario coroner to conduct a coroner's inquest into this matter, so that the lives of other people could be saved in the future. They really believe that our mental health laws need to be looked at, and I certainly support that.

I believe that this is an issue which could also be dealt with by the committee as it explores the issues of mental health in the province of Ontario and the challenges that are currently facing us. There is a lot to be done, but the responses that I've received from many members in this Legislature and the enthusiasm with which they've approached the opportunity to work together on this most important cause have been truly extraordinary. I thank all of the members who have spoken to me about that, and I look forward to hearing their further comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I am happy to be here to support this motion moved by the member from Whitby–Oshawa. I want it to take this opportunity as well to say how much I enjoy some of the resolutions that come forward from the Conservative members, because I've noticed over the years that there is a positive streak from time to time on some of the issues that I really can support. I have to say, opposition has done the Conservative Party a lot of good. I suspect within a couple more years they will get better at it. Who knows, they could be here yet for another four years in opposition, and with the growing time, become much more progressive. So I like this, I do.

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The member for Whitby–Oshawa has spoken very well on the issue, has talked about many facts, and we support all of that. We support everything you have said. There is no question that we need action on issues of mental health and addiction in this province. No question. The NDP supports the creation of a select committee dedicated to developing a comprehensive mental health and addiction strategy. That's a good thing. We know that the cost of substance abuse and mental illness for Ontario is \$34 billion each year; the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and partner organizations have provided that figure. They would know. We're talking about \$34-billion costs associated with substance abuse and mental health. It's huge. And 20% of the general population will suffer from mental illness or an addiction in their lifetime. Again, it's huge. Those statistics ought to worry us in terms of what we are doing to deal with it, to treat it, to prevent it and to provide the supports for so many people who are suffering from substance abuse and mental illness and/or will suffer in the future from this particular problem.

As it relates to youth, one in five of Ontario's youth will experience a mental health or behavioural disorder. Youth struggling with addictions often closely tied to mental illness issues fare no better; the facts on this are evident. The question is, what are governments doing about it? That's the real question. So I read an article in the Tribune and read comments made by Dr. Thoppil Abraham; he led a lecture titled Emotional Illness—Where Are We Going? He quickly answered that question by saying, “I don't think we are going anywhere.... This is the status quo. Canada is lagging 10th out of 16 countries in health care,” Abraham said, referring to a Conference Board of Canada study released Oct. 28.

“The study placed Japan, Switzerland and Sweden in the top three positions. He said, ‘Canada was given poor marks for failing to address mental illness. As you know, we still don't have a realistic plan for mental illness.’”

These are experts talking about this issue. They're telling us that we're spending \$34 billion to deal with these problems, but I don't think we have a coordinated approach to prevent the problems where we can, and I don't believe we have the supports to help people as best

as we can so they can lead healthy or productive lives in the best way that it is possible in those circumstances.

So, yes, we need to do more, but I have to tell you, we couldn't help finding the following information to tell you how many problems we have in the system and what we're doing to deal with them. In 2000 and 2001, nine regional task forces were established by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. The task forces' mandate was to focus on developing recommendations for regional and local improvements to mental health services across the province. In accordance with the ministry's mental health policy—it was called Making It Happen—the following forces were established: Northeastern Ontario; Northwestern Ontario; Champlain region; Southeast region; Central South region, Hamilton; Toronto-Peel; Central East, Whitby; Central East, Penetanguishene; and Southwest.

The MHITFs were designed to serve as mechanisms through which recommendations would be developed for the ministry with respect to provincial psychiatric hospital restructuring, community reinvestments and the implementation of mental health reforms. What happened to that? What did we do over the years? We have the knowledge, we have the expertise, but we're not using it, and we keep going back to more studies. While I support the studies, there are so many experts in the field. So let's not fool ourselves about the countless studies, the organizations, advocates, families, policy papers etc. that can already tell us what needs to be done to fix the system.

Coalitions such as are formed by Addictions Ontario, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and the Ontario Federation of Community, Mental Health and Addiction Programs have released invaluable reports that provide analysis of the work for the LHINs in terms of mental health and addictions: A Focus on Addictions and Mental Health: Review of LHIN Integrated Service Plans, 2007; and addressing ER wait times, Addressing Emergency Department Wait Times and Enhancing Access to Community Mental Health and Addictions Services and Supports. That was done in July 2008.

And what about other invaluable organizations that do this work on the front lines and are more than willing to share their ideas for policy reform, like Children's Mental Health Ontario, the Griffin Centre and, yes, the John Howard Society? So much advice has been given to us over the years, and the only thing that's missing is a commitment from governments to actually do something. If we don't do it when the economy is good, when are we going to do it? Then all of a sudden we have bad economic times and governments become very hesitant about what they are going to do—and yes, mon ami David, it's about cuts. It's the wrong time to make cuts. It's the wrong time to be doing it. It's the right time to be investing, because if we don't invest, more and more of the people who we're talking about today will have conditions that will be aggravated as a result of the lack of supports that we do not give them, the supports that they desperately need. So when we're talking about

spending \$34 billion—it will increase to the billions in time. We impoverish ourselves each and every time by not providing the supports we desperately need. We do this each and every time as governments. We are so short-sighted. We would rather spend on treating the problem than trying to prevent it; we do this each and every time.

We've got Steve Lurie, who's been the executive director of the Canadian Mental Health Association's Toronto branch since 1979. It's the largest community mental health organization. Last year it provided community support and housing services to 8,876 people living with mental illness in Toronto, and 2,880 people were served through the public education and mental health promotion programs. Mr. Lurie is also an adjunct professor of health and mental health policy at the University of Toronto faculty of social work and chair of the Mental Health Commission's service systems advisory committee. Here are Mr. Lurie's top 10 things that are needed to improve mental health care in Canada:

He says, what do they need? They need, first of all, a home: "Governments must commit to meeting the target of 57,000 supportive housing units for people living with mental illness, as outlined in the Senate report *Out of the Shadows at Last*. This must include funding for services and supports to help people choose and keep safe, affordable housing."

He talks about, second, a job: "Unemployment among people with ... mental illness is 80% to 90%, yet there is evidence that people with psychiatric disabilities want to work and can work if programs are put into place. People who are already working and experiencing mental health problems need access to employee assistance programs and programs like Mental Health Works that help workplaces accommodate workers who are living with mental illness."

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Three, they need a friend: "Many people living with mental illness want to connect with other people with similar experiences and help each other. Mental health systems need to dedicate 10% of their spending to funding peer support programs for people living with mental illness and their families, as well as fund drop-ins, activity centres, community kitchens and programs that foster a sense of community."

Four: "Cultural competence, language interpretation and newcomer services. Immigration is at its highest level in 75 years and there is evidence that immigrants' mental health declines the longer people are in Canada, due to migration stress, racism and employment difficulties."

Five: "Improve access to primary health care and chronic disease management."

Six: "More mental health services." There's a long list of what he recommends, and I don't have time to talk about that.

Seven: "More money."

Ten: "Health human resource strategy."

These are things experts know about and tell us, by way of suggestions, what we need to do. Yes, we need

more studies; they would be helpful, and maybe we could coordinate once and for all. But what we desperately need is a commitment from governments, both provincially and nationally, to spend the money we desperately need to provide services to people who are suffering from substance abuse and mental illness, and then we can have a civil society that indeed can be proud of itself.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: It is indeed a pleasure to stand in support of the motion by the member from Whitby—Oshawa. I'd like to focus, in the next few minutes, on one aspect of our province's mental health mosaic that, while it's not directly mentioned in the member's motion, is indeed important nonetheless.

There is a narrow band, what's called the grey area, in the spectrum that runs from intelligent to smart to gifted to brilliant to eccentric and beyond into the realm where the imbalance between the gift of genius is often counterbalanced by gaps in other areas, and these other areas we associate with mental health issues.

The issue I'm discussing is one in which our very, very best often find themselves coping with issues that need mental health assistance. I saw this, for example, among gifted, creative people in the private sector in my years working in public relations and advertising. Indeed, when I worked in the IT sector, I saw the very same types of issues all over again among the very best programmers and systems analysts who wrote software.

During the years I taught at Ryerson University, I remember discussing this particular phenomenon one time in class. The next week, and for a few weeks thereafter, some of my best and brightest students came to see me and talked about struggling with what amounted to mental health issues that revolved around their superior intellect. Indeed, they expressed the need for coping and adaptation skills. This is almost counterintuitive. You would think that the types of issues the member raises, and justifiably so, in an absolutely excellent resolution probably wouldn't touch these people. But indeed it's not limited merely to the people she mentions in the resolution.

I remember in particular a student in whose family a superior intellect runs through the generations. She referred to the wonderful mind God gave to her and her siblings as, and I'll use her own words, "the curse." It is said, I think with some basis, that the line between genius and madness is a fine one. Yet some of the most precious gems in Ontario's intellectual crown are found in the minds of our most brilliant and talented men and women. There can be no doubt that the mental health needs of our most gifted and most brilliant minds also figure in the intent of the fine motion brought forth by the member for Whitby—Oshawa.

It is true that we need a comprehensive Ontario mental health and addiction strategy. We need that strategy to address who needs the resources Ontario can bring to bear. We need that strategy to address how we might deliver our resources to those who truly need them. We

need that process that leads our province's strategy to engage our best minds and our stakeholders and draw out their thoughts and suggestions and needs, and do it in their own words.

To further this dialogue, I've added in these few minutes the concerns of gifted minds of boys and girls, men and women, fathers and mothers, employees and professional people, business owners and people from all walks of life who grapple with the dark side of creativity, of being a gifted writer or an actor, a musician, a performer, a composer, a designer, of having the insight to be able to see complex patterns in computer code or in mathematics or in nature or to have an intuitive grasp of the workings of machinery.

I think this is a fine resolution by an intelligent, and let me say gifted, member who brings a trained legal mind into her work on behalf of her constituents and for our province. I very strongly urge support for this resolution and I hope that the select committee that it proposes is formed and deployed quickly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to be able to speak to the private member's motion put forward by my caucus colleague from Whitby-Oshawa and to add my full support for Mrs. Elliott's notice of a motion calling for a select committee to develop a provincial mental health strategy—something that is long overdue, I might add, and I think that is coming from the sentiments of all of my colleagues in the Legislature this afternoon.

As was mentioned previously, the province is responsible for the delivery of most mental health and addiction services, so it's fitting that Ontario follow up with the federal government's lead through the Kirby report that was mentioned and the Mental Health Commission that he now serves. I remember when he was a senator and brought down the in-depth report on our health care situation.

I'll quote from the Ontario Hospital Association, a recent article on mental health and addiction, on how government can help. It lists three solutions: (1) improve access; (2) reduce stigma and discrimination; and (3) develop a province-wide mental health and addiction strategy, and increase resources.

Recently, one of the major papers referenced Mrs. Elliott's motion saying it will "put ... MPPs to work on a major contemporary issue that is exploding into a crisis." I believe the Minister of Health has also voiced his support of this motion. So hopefully we can come to some common ground on this very important matter.

The provincial budget of this year quoted about developing a mental health strategy. We haven't seen it or heard about that since, but I'm hoping again this is a push forward today by this resolution. Therefore, the intent of this motion will get the support of the House, and some government action will be put forward.

In my own riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, I want to acknowledge some hardworking organizations that are geared to providing mental health issues

and the care that's involved with them: CHIMO Youth and Family Services, Four County Crisis and their community mental health crisis response program. Certainly I've had a lot of dealings with the Kawartha Lakes chapter of the Canadian Mental Health Association, which serves the large geographical area of my riding. It certainly goes beyond the city of Kawartha Lakes; it includes Haliburton, Peterborough, Peterborough county and Brock township. Mr. Naresh James is the executive director there, and I've had the privilege to work with him and his staff in respect to many of their projects and initiatives. He is certainly a dedicated and proud individual of the commitments and successes that they have accomplished with limited resources and the geographical challenge that does exist in the riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. But they work hard, and they've been very successful in integrating services with partners so that there's a seamless stream of care for the people they do serve.

It's essential that the transfer of individuals in such difficult situations and mental health situations is done smoothly, and with the care and support that's needed. Mr. Naresh James has assured his full support of this motion and agreed with the need for a select committee.

He did add some further comments, which I want to include. There are three areas to which the province needs to respond: children and youth, adults and seniors. The needs to each of these are unique, yet also have some very common threads: the need for mental health promotion along with physical health promotion, controlling the stigma of mental illness, supportive housing, employment and income support. It's also important that we recognize the families who are providing care for the children or the parents in their own homes. The support, both financial and otherwise, that's required is crucial in order to help keep their family members in their homes. Certainly, a little bit of support to them can make a lot of difference. I think that what was brought up about the recent events that we've read in the newspapers, the tragedies that have occurred just within the last month and the connection with a mental health illness that has not been properly addressed is something that we all need to take notice of. It's a tragedy that could have been prevented, if we could only deal in a coordinated fashion with the mental health needs that are in our province, in our communities, that we see and that we can prevent.

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I certainly appreciate the fact that my colleague the member from Whitby-Oshawa has brought forward this motion for accountability, providing timelines and a deadline for a final report in 2010. We'd like to see that. We're happy to see a deadline come forward on this. Let me quote the following: "Clearly there is a need for a strategy in Ontario to respond to the Kirby report, and to coordinate the delivery of provincial services. The need is becoming urgent.... The time for action is now." That's from MPP Christine Elliott in the Ontario Bar Association Queen's Park report, and I certainly agree 100% with her report and her quote. I hope that the Legislature

moves forward this afternoon with this important select committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm pleased to stand up and speak in support of the resolution brought by the member from Whitby—Oshawa. I think it's a very important issue to talk about openly on a daily basis. I had the chance to serve with the member on the social policy committee when we toured the province of Ontario, when we were dealing with disability issues. I know her passion and her commitment to this file.

It's important to all of us to speak in support of and talk about this issue openly because it's important for all of us across the province of Ontario. I want to agree with what the member from Trinity—Spadina said about the Conservatives finally showing some kind of commitment toward health care and mental issues. I think it's very important for all of us.

I don't see anyone from this House not being able to support such an initiative to deal with the mental health issue in the province of Ontario. It's because it will affect all of us. Especially when we walk in the streets, we see a lot of mental patients walking the streets. We see a lot of people; they have no place to live. We see a lot of people suffering from mental issues or addiction. I think it's also important to bridge the health mental issue with the addiction issue, because they're related to each other.

I want to commend the member for bringing such an important issue to be discussed in this place. I also was pleased when I heard the Minister of Health, the Honourable David Caplan, speak in support because I think that he's committed to dealing with mental health issues in the province of Ontario, as all of us, as members of government since we got elected in 2003, have been exposed to this issue. We committed ourselves to deal with it, not just by talking about it, not just by publishing the report regarding mental health issues, but also by investing money in this area to support many patients across Ontario and support many organizations across the province in order for them to deal with such a severe and tragic issue.

When we deal with mental health issues, we indirectly deal with the safety of our people in the province of Ontario. We lower the cost of policing. We lower the cost of many different elements in our society. I think it's important to speak in support. Hopefully, as I said at the beginning, all of us will come together in the end to deal with such an important file, and deal with it once and for all.

I want to commend our government. I want to commend the previous Minister of Health, George Smitherman, and now David Caplan for continuing to invest money in this area in order to deal with it. Hopefully we'll continue to support it, and hopefully in the future we will see a lot of solutions. I think that to establish a committee from all the experts in the province of Ontario is such a great idea to help us to focus more on this issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to rise in support of this resolution. I want to thank my colleague the member for Whitby—Oshawa for bringing this matter to the House. We're encouraged by the response so far from the government. It appears that the very act of tabling this resolution has been met positively by the Minister of Health and by the government, and we look forward to working together.

I was looking forward to speaking to this resolution, and I thank the member for giving me the opportunity because I represent the riding of Newmarket—Aurora in the region of York. This is generally considered to be an area that has few problems, so to speak. It is above-average income, generally; the demographics are such that there's a lot of growth. Typically, up until recently anyway, there's very good employment. However, I've now been a member of the Legislature for some 13 years, and I can tell you that if there is an area that I believe needs the serious attention of this government, it is the area of mental health services.

Time and again I meet with parents, with individuals, with young people who are having a very difficult time accessing mental health services, and it's reflected in so many ways. I pulled together a group, a round table of individuals from my riding, this past May. The participants included Dr. Ras Paramsothy, the psychiatrist at Southlake Regional Health Centre—in fact, he's chief of psychiatry there; Patrick Lake, director of the York Region Children's Aid Society; James Thomson, executive director of Pathways for Children, Youth and Families; Dr. Dick Mean, the director of clinical services, Kinark Child and Family Services; and Sylvia Pivko, the executive director of Blue Hills Child and Family Centre. The reason for convening that group was to help me as the member get a better understanding of just what the circumstances were, what the needs are, what the challenges are in York region regarding mental health services. Much of our focus was on children's mental health. As a result of that meeting, the summary, the recommendations that came out and the facts that were shared with me were really quite disheartening. I committed at that time that as the MPP, I would do what I could to ensure that the government addressed the situation.

I want to share with you some of the highlights, the conclusions that were reached at that meeting; first of all, the need.

The fact is that the province-wide crisis in meeting the mental health needs of children and youth has been exacerbated in York region simply by the rapid growth of population in York region. A report prepared for the Strong Communities Coalition by PricewaterhouseCoopers showed that as of 2004, the per-child funding for children's services in York region was only 42% of the provincial average. The report York Region's Children states that approximately 39,000 children ages 0 to 18 experience mental health issues which require some intervention. At that time in York region, there was a capacity to serve about 5,000—5,000 of the 39,000 children who need help—and that gap continues to grow.

What was pointed out is that where the problems are, many times it's the resources that are lacking. Specifically, they refer to staff turnover. They mention that the reason that staff turnover in this area is so high is because salaries in children's mental health are significantly lower than for comparable positions in hospitals, schools, and the CAS. So a loss of competent staff obviously impedes service delivery.

The other aspect was provincial funding. There have been only two relatively small increases in base budgets, 3% and 5%, during the past 14 years. Each year, rising costs are addressed by reducing services and staff, leading to increased wait times. In York region, if a child today needs psychiatric attention, the waiting time is six to 18 months for a child to see a psychiatrist. For emergency services at Southlake Regional Health Centre—emergency services—the wait time is 24 to 48 hours. This is unacceptable.

1520

So I want to again commend my colleague the member for Whitby—Oshawa for bringing this forward and for ensuring that the government addresses this issue in a very comprehensive way through a select committee where it is not a function of trying to defend what the current state of affairs is. The fact that the government has agreed to address this through a select committee gives us reason to be hopeful that in fact this issue will be addressed.

Let me just conclude by saying that all of the good work that the select committee may well—and I'm confident will—do must then be met with the appropriate level of funding, so that we have a comprehensive plan to deal with mental health services throughout the province but we also have the attention of the government and the commitment, through the budgets of this province, to ensure that the appropriate resources are there to meet those needs that have been identified.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate. I certainly support the motion on the floor and would agree with many other speakers who have spoken so far in that I believe it's long overdue. I commend the member for bringing it forward and commend the minister for being so receptive. Often in this place, we end up in an adversarial situation, but I think this is an issue that maybe transcends partisan politics.

If members from other parties are getting the same visits in their constituency office that I'm getting—often we'll see people coming in who have children with eating disorders, children who are dealing with addictions. If you talk to the police officers in my community, they tell me that amongst young people there's barely a crime that gets committed that doesn't have a drug involvement. I talk to the people who treat drug addictions for young people in our community and what they tell me is that there's barely a drug addiction that doesn't have an underlying mental health issue. The two I think are connected in such a way that we need to coordinate the ser-

vices. Perhaps some of the services we're already providing we need to coordinate in a way that can do a much better job for our young people.

There's a group of people led by Michael Kirby that I've become very familiar with that is trying to bring this issue out of the shadows. They're trying to elevate the issue to the same way we treat an illness such as heart and stroke or cancer, any one of those illnesses. This group is trying to put it on the front page and is trying to put it in the forefront of all our minds. They need to be commended for that. The economic cost alone of mental illness to our society is something that we just haven't come to grips with.

I think many people would be absolutely surprised at the impact that it's having, not only in our schools and on the future lives of our young people, but indeed on the businesses that operate on a daily basis. The impact is staggering when you get down to it. When you look at the link to homelessness, you'll find that there are underlying mental health issues as well. When you look at emergency room admissions—this absolutely shocked me. I assumed anybody going into an emergency room in my community was bleeding, had a broken bone, had a sprained whatever or had an illness. A large proportion of those people are attending for psychiatric disorders, attending for things like panic, anxiety and a number of things that are related to mental health. I believe there are a number of people out there who are self-medicating because they can't get the sort of treatment they should have for mental health conditions, and that's something we need to come to grips with.

On a purely voluntary basis, my wife and I went down to an addiction centre in Pennsylvania this year because we'd heard they were doing a good job and a number of Ontario's young people were down there. So we took a few days out of our summer vacation and went to see some of the services that can be provided. I'll tell you, I was absolutely surprised that the image I had in my own mind of somebody dealing with mental health issues was blown apart that day. I met some vibrant, dynamic young people from our province who couldn't get the treatment they needed in our province and really had to go out of country to get that treatment. They allowed me the privilege of sitting in a group therapy session. I thought that was very accommodating of them because it is a tough thing to do, to pour out your soul while there is a complete stranger in the room. I left that meeting thinking that these kids wouldn't be too far out of place running a major corporation on Bay Street. These were some of our sharpest minds, these were kids that had tremendous futures ahead of them, and yet they were dealing with the demons of either drug addiction or alcoholism. They just hadn't gotten the treatment for mental health issues in the past that they should have.

I want to commend the member. I think this is a great issue for us to unite around from all three parties. It's something that I think is going to have a tremendous impact on the future of our society. It's something that I want to get involved in myself, obviously, because I just

have too many trips into my constituency office from constituents who need help, and that help currently simply isn't available in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Whitby—Oshawa, Mrs. Elliott, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I would like to thank the members from Trinity—Spadina, Mississauga—Streetsville, Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, London—Fanshawe, Newmarket—Aurora and Oakville for their very helpful comments and suggestions. I certainly do appreciate their support for this resolution.

I would like to just make a few comments on some of the points. They were all excellent points that were raised, but one that was raised by the member from Trinity—Spadina was with respect to the issue of employment opportunities for people with mental health problems. It's true that many people do want to work but are faced with a whole host of problems in facing employment, such as a fear of clawback of or elimination of ODSP benefits, and there are a lot of reluctant employers out there who, quite frankly, are fearful of hiring people with mental health problems.

So I think that there is a whole campaign of education that needs to go on out there to reduce the stigma and also to let employers know that there's a whole host of people out there who want to work. We're eliminating thousands and thousands of people from our workforce who could be productive, who could make great contributions to our society. It would help us as a society to advance inclusionary practices for them to be involved in the workforce and to make their contribution.

I'd also like to just comment on something that's happening locally in my own community that is quite innovative—I really would be remiss if I didn't mention that—and that is a drug court that has been started in our riding. They're hoping to expand that to a mental health court as well. This is a really truly innovative project that has involved the co-operation of the Pinewood Centre and on the addiction side, Durham Mental Health Services, a great community mental health program and service agency in Whitby, and Oshawa, the police, the defence counsel and the crown attorneys and courts in our area. What they're really trying to do is work with people to help them overcome their problems and become productive members of society.

I thank you for the opportunity. I thank all the members who contributed to the debate today and for their support.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will vote on Mrs. Elliott's ballot item in about 50 minutes' time.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE BOARD

Mr. Robert Bailey: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the McGuinty government should: (a) immediately order the Auditor General to conduct a thorough audit of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board to

determine if the plan to eliminate the unfunded liability by 2014 is on target; and (b) order the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board to publicly release quarterly reports on the status of the unfunded liability.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Bailey moves private members' notice of motion number 70. Pursuant to standing order 98, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure for me to rise today to move this motion asking for the Auditor General to do a review of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board's long-stated plan to wipe out the board's unfunded liability by 2014. If passed, this motion will also demand that the WSIB provide quarterly updates on the status of that unfunded liability to members of this Ontario Legislature. This is a key accountability issue that all members should take very seriously and be very concerned about, and I hope it will get their support.

What is the unfunded liability? Well, the unfunded liability is that difference in value between the board's assets and the future commitments against those assets. It is by far the best indicator of the board's financial health.

1530

Privately owned insurance companies and pension plans are forbidden by law from having unfunded liabilities. If they occur, the pension plans are ordered by the government to eliminate them, and if not, they would have to wrap up those programs.

In 2006, the unfunded liability of this government agency was just under \$6 billion; it had been going down. At that time, the WSIB chair announced that the board had "turned the financial corner." Yet, even at the time those words were published in the summer of 2007, the board's finances were still slipping, and the board ended 2007 with a negative investment return. The corner that the board turned ran them right into a brick wall. The unfunded liability jumped 35% from 2006 to 2007, to \$8.1 billion. That was before the recent market meltdown. The frightening reality is that this unfunded liability has likely more than doubled in the last two years. This is unprecedented.

Businesses in the past have agreed to premium increases as long as it meant that the unfunded liability was being reduced. The unfunded liability hampers the ability of the board to offer benefits to injured workers and threatens future employers with increases to their premiums. This mismanagement of the WSIB must be reined in before it worsens and threatens the long-term viability of the safety net that workers across this province depend on.

Will the Minister of Labour come clean and announce to this House now what the state of the WSIB unfunded liability is? Will he let Ontarians know that the good ship WSIB is taking on water and sinking fast?

It's true that there are reasons that the unfunded liability grew so dramatically.

First, the government moved to index benefits beyond statutory levels, which added \$2.8 billion to the unfunded liability.

Second, the number of injuries has declined steadily over the years, but the benefit costs have been going up, as has the average time on claims and benefit costs.

Third is the most troubling: It is the board's investment portfolio and the returns they are getting on those investments. In order for the board to meet its plan to eliminate the unfunded liability by 2014, the board has to have a net return of approximately 7%. According to the board's financial statements, last year's rate of return was in the negative column. I can only imagine what the investment portfolio would be doing now. When stock markets worldwide are melting down, the \$14-billion-plus WSIB portfolio must be taking a huge hit. Of course, the board won't tell us how their investments are doing, but I think if you watched your own investment statements, you would know that their investments have probably followed the same.

The money that the board has invested is Ontario taxpayers' and workers' money. We deserve to know how those investments are doing. All MPPs should be interested in how this investment portfolio is doing.

As I said, the unfunded liability jumped a whopping 35% from 2006 to 2007. I would warn every member here that the WSIB's unfunded liability will spike again this year, and I bet we'll be closer to \$12 billion by the end of the year, if not higher. It is in the interests of workers across this province and our constituents that the financial management of the WSIB be put under review.

My objective with this motion is that we should know the state of finances at the WSIB. We should know what we are expecting.

I also believe that we need an unbiased view on whether or not the WSIB can in fact eliminate the unfunded liability by 2014. If they can't make that deadline, then change it and come up with a realistic plan that will eliminate that unfunded liability. The government and the WSIB, if they are serious about wiping out the unfunded liability, are faced with some pretty tough choices. They will either have to reduce benefits, raise rates charged to businesses, or both.

Given that the government has just passed Bill 119, which has imposed a heavy new tax on small business in the form of WSIB premiums, I would hope that the board is not giving consideration to raising premiums charged to these new businesses. That would be an economic disaster for Ontario and put the brakes on job creation like nothing else. I would like to see a commitment from the government that employer premiums be frozen for the next four years. The board needs to admit that the plan to wipe out their unfunded liability is not going to work, and they need to develop a more realistic strategy on that unfunded liability.

The government should also demand an audited financial statement from the board as of October 31 this year, to be publicly released by the end of December. Financial statements should be released every quarter after that. This is something that happened in the 1990s during hard times, and it should happen again.

We should be demanding that the WSIB and the Minister of Labour come clean about the state of finances

at the board, and they should tell us whether or not they can make the 2014 deadline for wiping out the unfunded liability.

This government is developing a sorry reputation on WSIB reform. Under their watch, the unfunded liability will grow to historic levels, and they will be responsible for making fundamental changes to the way the WSIB works that will, in the end, add to the unfunded liability.

When Bill 119 was forced through this House, it included a whole group of people who can now make new claims on the WSIB system. We have no idea what the financial impact will be on the board because of these changes. Everyone remembers these changes. They were forced through this House with minimal debate and over the objections of many small business owners from all over Ontario. We believe that was a mistake.

What is clear to all of us is that the government and the WSIB need to change tracks. Holding the course will only make the unfunded liability worse; it will not make it better.

The global financial meltdown may be beyond the total control of this government, but when things have changed so much, they need to look at what exposure the WSIB has to the equity markets and make sure that this money is being handled appropriately. The best way to do that is through the Auditor General.

We can surmise how the board's finances are doing just by reading the newspapers. In the *Toronto Star* on October 10, there was the headline "Pension Plans Take Biggest Hit in Decade." At the end of the third quarter of 2008, Canadian pension plans reportedly suffered their biggest quarterly loss in a decade, and that was before the crash that we saw in October.

Private pension plans are typically better capitalized than the board's. According to the *Star*, they were capitalized at a peak of 120% funding ratio in 1999; private funds are in the low 70s, as of September 2008.

In early October, Ontario's finance minister warned that "tough times" are ahead for Ontario. The board is not immune, nor is it alone. Action does need to be taken, though. It has to start with a thorough discussion about whether or not this unfunded liability can be reduced to zero by 2014. The Auditor General could help with us that. If this plan is found to be not working, the board needs to accept that and come up with a realistic plan to solve this problem, and I would urge the minister to work with them to do that.

One of the things that they could do to help get some of their costs under control and help solve some fraud issues would be to move to a named insurance system, so that the WSIB would know exactly who is covered and who isn't. I know people say that this is a complex system that could take years to implement. Somehow we manage to do this with OHIP, we manage to do it with EI, we manage to do it with many government-run programs; so why can't we do it with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board? I think we can; it's just easier if we don't.

We believe that the WSIB is in serious need of reform so that it better serves our injured workers and helps con-

tribute to the economic growth of the province. Unfortunately, we aren't sure that the government has the will to do that.

I am looking forward to the rest of the debate today. I hope that the government sees that this is an accountability measure that would help all MPPs better understand the finances of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, which is so important to so many of our constituents.

This House must force the WSIB to rein in their financial mismanagement practices and put an end to the unfunded liability. This problem not only threatens the taxpayers' pocketbooks, but more importantly, it threatens the long-term viability of that safety net that's so important to our workers across this province and which they depend on so much.

I look forward to the rest of the afternoon's debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Just so you know, I say to Mr. Bailey, the remaining two and a half minutes you have will be added to your two-minute summation time, if you so choose.

Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Aw, jeez, the member for Sarnia-Lambton is such a capable member of this Legislature, and I really do like him, and he has done a good job since his election, but I'm just not with him on this one, and let me tell you why.

I have no qualms, quite frankly, about an audit of the WSIB. As a matter of fact, I'd love to see Steve Mahoney's expenditures. I would delight in looking at the restaurant receipts and the bar tabs. I have no qualms about saying that. I don't think any of us should be frightened about the prospect of the Auditor General auditing WSIB.

1540

It's not rocket science to note that there isn't a pooled fund in the world that isn't worth less on December 4, 2008, than it was a month ago, never mind two or three months ago. As a matter of fact, I take some perverse pleasure, I suppose, because there are more than a few people here, including Conservatives, who adopted a self-controlled pension plan back in 1996. Mike Harris and the Conservatives came up with this spectacular proposition of ending MPP pensions. I delighted in the proposition. It's not that we don't have pensions. We have what are called defined contribution pensions, which are becoming the vogue; it's part of a whole trend internationally—a very frightening trend—not just here.

It's fine if you're a 401(k) kind of pensioner. If you're making \$500,000 a year, you can deal with it. You've got such huge amounts that if you lose 10%, 20%, 30%, you're still not going to end up on welfare; you're still not going to be on the relief line. But what MPPs did here at Queen's Park—the Tories led the way, and the Liberals and New Democrats followed in lockstep—was they collapsed the defined benefit pension plan, which was overly rich. I remember, at the time, presenting a private member's bill that simply said you had to be 55 before you could collect. Remo Mancini, from down Wind-

sor way, was in his early 40s and collecting a pension that would choke a horse. It probably did choke more than a few horses down Windsor way.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mr. Bailey interjects, and I'm not sure how appropriately.

So here we have all these MPPs with a pension plan, but it's self-controlled. Every year—what is it?—10% of our gross salary gets put into this pension plan. Mind you, just like WSIB's pooled funds are worth a heck of a lot less now than they were a month ago, I dare say there are more than a few members here whose pension plans are worth a heck of a lot less than they were a few months ago.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: He interjects. That was Flynn?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. Please refer to the honourable member by his riding name.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I tried to get him on the record. If he's going to heckle and be in Hansard, he has to speak up so the young woman here can get him at the point at which I acknowledge him.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I was helping you.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Now, let's understand that the WSIB shouldn't be immune from an audit proposition. We fundamentally disagree, though, with the observation that you address shortfalls in funding, underfunding and unfunded liabilities by reducing benefits. Quite frankly, one of the most effective ways of addressing the issue of unfunded liabilities is reducing exposure and increasing workplace safety. The other very important way of doing it is ensuring that every employer in this province—that means every worker in this province, every working woman and man—is entitled to WSIB coverage.

We supported the most recent legislation that extended WSIB coverage to construction workers who were contractors/self-employed; we supported that without hesitation. But at the time we made note of the fact that there remain huge numbers of workers, over a million workers in this province—I should apologize; that number may be outdated, because so many people have lost jobs in the last short period of time that the number could be fewer than a million, but at one point not that long ago, before Mr. McGuinty became Premier, over a million workers who were working in this province had no WSIB coverage. One third of the workforce in the province doesn't have mandatory WSIB coverage. That means that those employers aren't making contributions to the plan.

And who or what are the biggest chunks of those employers? The financial and banking industry, and this government has demonstrated itself to be so deep in the back pockets of the big banks that it's spitting out lint. The big banks have won every round, whether it's the reduction in capital taxes—we know who that benefits: the big banks. I must note: Take a look at profit reports. While profits are down, profits are still substantial for the big banks. And do you know why? Because they nickel and dime you every step of the way.

You ever play poker, Mr. Speaker? You've been in a couple of poker games; I don't know that for a fact but I can presume that. Well, you play poker and you know that at the end of the day, if you play poker long enough, who's got all the money? It's the guy holding the poker game who is taking the rake. You play long enough, and nobody has any money because the guy holding the game, the house with its rake, takes every penny. The banks are the same thing. At the end of the day they'll have it all, because whether your investments with them increase or decrease, the bank is charging you every step of the way. Yet these are the people whom this government gives breaks to, not only when it comes to its reduction of capital taxes but when it comes to deferring to the banks and ensuring that banks do not have to participate in WSIB. I can't say with certainty—and this is the sort of thing, quite frankly—that a report by the Auditor General might well prove useful about, as to what banks' and other financial institutions' participation in the WSIB system would do to unfunded liability. I suspect it would make a significant dent in unfunded liability.

Let me make it clear: You don't address unfunded liability by reducing workers' pensions. You don't address unfunded liability by reducing compensation. You don't address unfunded liability by exempting more and more employers from having to participate in WSIB. You do it, in fact, by ensuring workplace safety, by being tough, mean and hard about workplace safety. You do it, for instance, by rewarding good employers with good health and safety programs, employers which encourage and assist workers who are injured in filing claims, and then not targeting, because they've been honest and frank with the system, by having them marked, red-flagged, tagged as high-risk. Because when you do that, it sends a message out to employers across the province that they're better off, that they have an incentive to deny and suppress claims and encourage workers to not make claims when workers suffer injuries in those workplaces.

So here we are; New Democrats are not at all afraid. I don't know why the government would be, either. The government, I would think—I don't know; I can't anticipate what they are going to do. It's a Liberal government and one of the nice things about being a Liberal is that you don't always have to be, so who knows where the government is going to be on this particular issue? It could be over here, it could be over here, it could be right up here, it could be over—it could start right up here and then go over here. So I have no idea. But for the life of me, here's a resolution. The government disagrees with the Conservatives around the issue of the WSIB coverage of the contract or self-employed construction workers. I understand that.

What we've witnessed over the last couple of weeks are a couple of old dogs circling, raising their hind legs, marking turf. Quite frankly, the Minister of Labour and Mr. Bailey can engage in that exercise. It's not our dispute. We have made our position very, very clear. But for the life of me, if the government was confident about

the governance of WSIB and its funds, if they were prepared to be as transparent as Mr. McGuinty promised to be—but then again, it was a promise, so can we expect him to keep it? I ask sarcastically. One would think the government would say, "Of course. We welcome the Auditor General examining what's going on down the road here, all the way from the plush, thick-carpet offices where Mr. Mahoney with his Prada shoes and his fine—well, his Harry Rosen suits, shuffles along"—his biggest fear is static electricity from the plush carpet.

So you would think the government would welcome an examination, an audit of what goes on down the road here, everywhere from Mr. Mahoney's plush office with its lavish bar and the expensive Baccarat crystal all the way down to the hard-working WSIB workers who are out there staffing in the field, dealing with workers' claims with some incredible pressure from management. One would think the government would welcome that. One would then, question, without imputing motive—because of course, you can't impute motive, can you? Far be it from me to impute motive. One would then question why the government wouldn't agree to do this. The motion leaves the timing entirely up to Mr. McGuinty and his minions. The motion doesn't say it'll happen now or it'll happen in three months; the motion simply is a recommendation from this Legislature to have an Auditor General examination of the books and, more and most importantly, public disclosure. What's wrong with that? What's wrong with public disclosure, some sunshine, as we approach these dark, gloomy December and January days?

1550

Hon. David Caplan: You were a Sunshine Boy.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I was a Sunshine Boy, you bet your boots, Mr. Caplan; and one thing I can tell you is, you'll never be one.

Hon. David Caplan: I'll never be one.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mr. Caplan responds. That is a certainty.

So here we are: I leave this dispute to the Conservative and the Liberal caucuses, but I await with great enthusiasm the government's rationale for not supporting it, if indeed they're not going to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Vic Dhillon: Bob Bailey, the member from Sarnia-Lambton, introduced the following motion to be debated today: "That, in the opinion of this House, the McGuinty government should: (a) immediately order the Auditor General to conduct a thorough audit of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board to determine if the plan to eliminate the unfunded liability by 2014 is on target; and (b) order the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board to publicly release quarterly reports on the status of the unfunded liability."

The Auditor General can examine any area of the government's financial accounts and transactions. There is no area of government spending that is out of bounds, including the WSIB. The Provincial Auditor has formal

and regular representation on the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board's audit and finance committee. The Provincial Auditor also performs regular reviews as contained in his 1993, 1997 and 2005 annual reports. There are no restrictions, no limitations on what the auditor can examine.

The Auditor General Act gives the auditor the mandate to examine the government's financial accounts and transactions, and to report his findings to the Legislature. He is to report on instances of misuse or mismanagement of public funds, overexpenditures and other irregularities. The Auditor General is also charged with assessing whether public resources are well administered, and whether government and broader public sector activities are managed with due regard to economy and efficiency. Under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, section 169, the WSIB's accounts must be audited each year. In addition, the Provincial Auditor has a permanent representative on the WSIB board of directors' audit and finance committee. As a member of this committee, the Provincial Auditor has access to all WSIB funding strategy discussions.

In 2004, the Ministry of Labour commissioned a third party audit of the WSIB. The WSIB's books were opened and a team of auditors reviewed its operating procedures and practices. Sixty-four recommendations were made, and the WSIB developed a comprehensive and strategic response which has ensured that each of these recommendations has now been addressed. The follow-up audit results noted that significant progress has been made in modern management practices at the WSIB, and that work continues to achieve full maturity of these practices.

The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board has a robust and responsive plan in place. The funding framework, the investment strategy, the five-year strategic plan and the prevention strategy work together to address challenges in the system, provide appropriate worker benefits and ensure financial sustainability.

The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board's financial situation has changed with the volatility in the financial markets, the economic uncertainty, the impact on employment rates and the negative effects being felt in key industries such as construction, manufacturing, automotive and forestry. Today's volatile markets mean that short-term low returns are inevitable for most, if not all, investors. It is important to remember that for any investor, the principle of staying the course must be applied.

The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board has sole responsibility for setting premium rates and dealing with its unfunded liability. The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board takes its stewardship role of the insurance fund investments very seriously, as it has a legal obligation to ensure that premiums are prudently invested. The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board governance framework for the insurance fund includes oversight and approval by the investment committee and the board of directors.

The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board is constantly reviewing its investment strategies and has engaged some of the most highly regarded experts in the field to advise and to provide management services for its investments. Over the last several years, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board has made significant progress in improving worker benefits, proactively addressing rising costs and improving customer service, all while holding the line on premium rates for three years running.

The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board's funding framework is a planned and disciplined approach to managing the risks and uncertainties presented by the unfunded liability, as well as increasing health care costs and the impacts of occupational disease. The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board's board of directors approved the 2008 funding framework in April 2008. Employer stakeholders were invited to participate in consultation and information sessions. The funding framework is posted on the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board's website.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: With this motion by my colleague from Sarnia-Lambton, really what he's looking for is for the Liberal government to do a little extra, a little hard work. The response from the member for Brampton West reminds me of my days in the union when we used to have a little slogan that went something like this: "A little hard work never hurt anybody, but why take the chance?" Right? That's what this Liberal government is like. Why take the chance on a little hard work?

I think it's clear we have an \$8-billion unfunded liability, and we're asking for the Auditor General to investigate and provide some disclosure. But I think what's important and we also have to recognize is that this WSIB—this is what happens when government creates a monopoly. The monopoly just grows and grows out of control into a monster of unfunded liability, an \$8-billion anchor of liability on the people of this province.

As my colleague referenced in his opening comments, this is unacceptable. It would be illegal if it was a private insurance fund; unfunded liabilities are disallowed. If we look back at our traditions, we have a tradition in this House that government is neither above nor beneath the law, that our agencies, our actions, cannot be above the law, but that's what we've done with the WSIB. We have created this monster that is beyond the law; it is above the law. The WSIB is not subject to the checks and balances of the marketplace; it's not subject to competition. It's really only subject to the pressures of political patronage from the other side, and this is what happens: Taxpayers are on the hook for that lack of checks and balances.

Now, as my colleague asked, is the time to rein in this monster somewhat, to put some checks and balances in there with the Auditor General. But instead, we've seen this Liberal government with their Bill 119. What they are interested in doing is not reining in the WSIB, but

feeding it more and more, feeding it with our small businesses—and I'll tell you, its appetite is endless. We are putting our small business people in jeopardy, and you won't do anything. You won't do that little bit of hard work.

1600

I'm in support of this motion by my colleague from Sarnia-Lambton. It's an important first step in bringing accountability to the WSIB, and it's also an important first step for this Legislative Assembly to take ownership of our responsibility and to exercise our oversight over our crown agencies, commissions and boards. I encourage all members in this House to support this very reasonable, appropriate and practical motion and save the people of this province from another Liberal boondoggle.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

The honourable member from London-Fanshawe.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me a chance to speak about the bill brought by the member from Sarnia-Lambton.

I was listening to the member from Sarnia-Lambton speaking about the WSIB. I'm not sure what he has against the WSIB. Before, he talked about different bills in the House and he asked us not to support all the workers becoming enrolled under the WSIB. I don't know why. Now he's coming back again in a different format and in a different fashion to speak against WSIB.

I just want to clear something up for the many people who are listening to us today, and especially the member from Sarnia: I think the Auditor General has a right to go to any government agency or board and investigate and report on them. This is his job. I had the chance to sit in public accounts the other day, and I remember we were talking about all the ministries and many different issues. I think the Auditor General's role is to investigate and to keep all those agencies and boards and the ministries accountable to the taxpayers.

I don't know what this member has against the WSIB.

I'm not going to support this bill because I think it does not—

Mr. Peter Kormos: Motion, Khalil.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Motion. My apologies. I'm not going to support this motion because I think it does not reflect reality. I think the Ministry of Labour and our government have been taking this issue seriously for many, many years. We believe strongly in the right of all the workers in the province of Ontario to be covered by WSIB. I believe strongly that WSIB is a great tool to protect all the workers and to give them support when they need it. Again, that's why I'm not going to support it.

Thank you for allowing me to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I'd just remind the honourable members not to have their Black-Berrys near their microphones. It has happened three times in the last hour, and it plays havoc with the ears of our translators.

Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: This is a wonderful motion that has been introduced by the member for Sarnia-Lambton.

I think it was our government that set the goal that we would balance the unfunded liability of the WSIB board by 2014, which is its 100th anniversary in the province of Ontario. We've been looking after injured workers in this province for 100 years. It was pretty proactive legislation back before the First World War, so it's something that certainly should be looked after properly.

I think it's important to understand the magnitude of the problem that we're facing. In 2006, the unfunded liability was about \$6 billion. That was only two years ago. Today, with the meltdown in the markets, it's estimated that it's in excess of \$11 billion or \$12 billion. We don't know. I think it's a very dangerous precedent to set when a crown corporation of this government doesn't know what its situation is; when the people of Ontario, who are ultimately responsible for their workers' compensation board, don't know. One of the first tenets of managing anything is to have the numbers. If you can't measure the numbers, you can't manage the company. Not knowing where that unfunded liability sits is extremely dangerous.

Some of the things that have happened at the WSIB recently that have led to this unfunded liability are also of concern. When the board gives generous increases to workers' benefits—it's lovely to give increases to workers; that's a great thing to do; it's wonderful—when you can afford it. When you can't afford it, it's irresponsible to do it. Those generous increases that were given, which were well beyond the indexing and the statutory levels, created \$2.3 billion in excess unfunded liability.

I say that's an irresponsible way of managing the resources of this province—the WSIB being an important resource of this province. That is a very difficult, difficult thing to have to swallow, when they go outside their mandate. We understand that the number of accidents has been declining in the province of Ontario, and that's a good thing. That speaks well of management. But the benefit costs have gone up, and the medical costs have gone up. So some of the things that are going on within the board are not being managed very well, I would say, from those results. Perhaps with a good audited report, they would prove me wrong. But the fact again is that we don't know. The numbers can lead you to believe that there are some poor management practices going on, but we don't know, and not knowing makes it very, very difficult to manage.

The critical thing about this motion is the oversight aspect of it. Someone has to have oversight of these huge amounts of money. It doesn't seem to be this government taking that responsibility.

I take great pleasure in supporting this motion from the member from Sarnia-Lambton.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to all the members here, and to those watching on TV, it does speak volumes that the members of the provincial Conservative Party here

never once, not once, mentioned injured workers—not once.

Today I had at the Ministry of Labour the Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups meeting with me, and I see the sacrifices that many of these injured workers go through daily. The members from that party over there, provincial Conservative Party, want to see those injured workers suffer more.

In 1994, for those watching and those listening, there was something that was called the Friedland formula that was brought forward that affected the benefits of workers. That came through under the NDP, and then there was the modified Friedland formula under the Tories where the Tories just slashed and burned the benefits of injured workers—155,000 workers out there, some with amputations, who have lost limbs and those with different health conditions who can't work today. What that party is saying over there is, "Who cares? Who cares? Let's just cut their benefits even more."

Well, the Ontario Liberal Party does not believe that. We believe that those workers need our support. We believe they deserve respect and dignity, and that's why, after all these long years—I'll tell you, over 10 years, from 1994 to 2004, where inflation rose by 29%, in particular the Conservative Party over there raised benefits by only 2.5%. That is shameful. That is so despicable. That party allowed that the benefits of those vulnerable workers would be diminished by almost a third.

Well, we have reversed that trend. We've increased, now, benefits to those injured workers twice, by 2.5% each time—5%. We're going to be increasing those benefits again by 2.5%; that'll be 7.5%.

1610

Here's what the Tories think about the Auditor General. Listen, we like the Auditor General. In 2003 here's what the Provincial Auditor said at the time: "That party over there, the Conservative Party, has saddled your new government with \$5.8 billion in deficit." That's what the Provincial Auditor told us. We had to overcome that and continue to work on those important services of health care, education, infrastructure and social services for our communities, saddled with \$5.8 billion by the Tories. Tories attacked the Auditor General instead of working in partnership with him.

I guess you didn't do your homework, I say to the member from Sarnia-Lambton, because the Auditor General today sits permanently on the WSIB board, sits permanently on the audit and finance committee. Do your homework, sir. Under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, the WSIB accounts must be audited each year. Do your homework, sir. Annual reports are tabled here every year. Do your homework, sir. The Tories attempted to avoid a—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you, Minister. Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I find it fascinating to stand here and listen to the labour minister ostensibly discuss the content of this motion, invoke what he thinks may have been historically the case with the WSIB under previous

Conservative governments, talk about imaginary deficits, talk about anything but the motion. The motion deals with an audit. Take an abacus and count: one, two, three, four, five. It's an audit. We want to know numbers. I would think that the labour minister and the McGuinty government would want to know exactly the same thing that my friend from Sarnia-Lambton wants to know, so I rise today to support the motion introduced by my colleague from Sarnia-Lambton on WSIB and unfunded liability.

Let's first of all define very particularly for people who may be watching us at home, what is unfunded liability? It's a technical term for unpaid debts that have yet to be paid; in other words, coming debts. We know we owe the money. We just don't have to pay them quite yet. That's illegal for private insurance companies. People go to jail if they have any unfunded liabilities, and rightly so. Besides, have you ever heard of an insurance company that doesn't make money? I never have. I'm thinking of an old joke here: Do you want to start a small business? Start a large one and let that labour minister run it.

At the end of 2007, the WSIB had \$8.1 billion more in long-term liabilities that are owed than it has in assets. Actually, in the real world that would be called bankruptcy. This is a 35% jump from 2006 to 2007, and I'm sure the government will say that the recent stock market meltdown has caused this outrageous jump. But you know, it's funny, I don't see any private insurance companies going broke, and they would be if they had those numbers. We need—

Hon. David Caplan: AIG.

Mr. Peter Shurman: That's not a Canadian insurance company. This is the Canadian system. We need the people on the other side of this House to stop stonewalling on this and every other issue.

I would like to point out that the WSIB issue was the case before the market started fluctuating. The minister said in committee, on September 12, 2008, "We need to be prepared to stay the course." What, keep increasing the unfunded liability? Is that staying the course? Staying the course is not enough to work in these tough economic times.

We need to have the Auditor General conduct the audit that my colleague is demanding so that we in this House can see how well and if the plan is proceeding. That's what this is about. With a funding ratio of 66% in 2007, one can only imagine what the books look like today. The estimates that we hear from my friend from Sarnia-Lambton are potentially \$12 billion. With how the markets have been doing lately, it is reasonable to assume that there has been a massive spike in unfunded liability. Some say it may even have doubled, but how do we know? That's why we're asking the question, and that's why my friend has put forward this motion.

I fail to understand why the government can't just say, "Sure." It's an audit. After all, it's not your money; it's everyone's money. Let's find out where it is. The government likes to keep everyone in the dark on important

issues; for example, when you're going to send the people of York back to work. But I digress. Why is it that the number of injuries has declined but the costs have risen? Inverse relationship.

You've got to come to the table. You've got to answer the question. The question is framed very well in the motion. It's succinct. My friend from Sarnia-Lambton speaks for us on the labour file. He deserves an answer.

I will support this motion, and I would ask that all members of this House do likewise.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Sarnia-Lambton, Mr. Bailey, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a great pleasure to reply to all the excellent feedback that I had today on this resolution. I'd like to thank the members from Welland, Brampton West, Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, London-Fanshawe, Halton, the Minister of Labour himself, of course, and also the member from Thornhill.

One thing I'd like to get clear and put on the record is, the Conservative Party supports the WSIB. In fact—

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Well, just wait a minute now, before you ooh and aah too much. It was actually Sir James Whitney and Sir William Hearst, both Conservative Premiers—

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I know not too many of you were here. Some of them are gone, the more senior members. But it was their governments in 1914 that introduced the compensation board—not as we know it today, but the first forms of WSIB. So there's a little history for some of you guys. I like history myself.

Anyway, what we're trying to do is just bring some light, shed some light, open up the doors and the windows, let the light in and look at this unfunded liability. We've got a concern on this side of House, as I know all the members do, with the finances of the public. All three parties do; I know they do. So I'd just ask them to take a look at that and support this resolution. It's not going to do anything drastic. I mean, if it's an unfunded liability, let's find out how much it is.

I don't think we have an Auditgate here, as far as I can understand. What does everyone have to hide, right? The member there in the front row is agreeing with me, from Oak Ridges-Markham. He's agreeing that—

Mr. Frank Klees: Newmarket-Aurora.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Newmarket-Aurora. That's right; you didn't move yet. Anyway, they're all agreeing with me.

I think that this party—what we're asking for is to open the doors and let in the light. Let's do the audit, find out exactly where we stand, and let the people of Ontario and us as their representatives in this Legislature also know.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, all the members.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (CHILD PASSENGERS ON MOTORCYCLES), 2008 LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (ENFANTS PASSAGERS SUR DES MOTOCYCLETES)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will first deal with ballot item number 61, standing in the name of Ms. Jaczek. Ms. Jaczek has moved second reading of Bill 117, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the driving and operation of motorcycles with child passengers.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Ms. Jaczek, would you like to refer this bill to committee?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to refer it to the justice policy committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to committee? Agreed? So referred.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with private member's ballot item number 62. Mrs. Elliott has moved private members' notice of motion number 65.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE BOARD

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item number 63. Mr. Bailey has moved private members' notice of motion number 70.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes.

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1619 to 1624.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Bailey, Robert	Elliott, Christine	Klees, Frank
Barrett, Toby	Hudak, Tim	Shurman, Peter

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dickson, Joe	McNeely, Phil
Arthurs, Wayne	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Moridi, Reza
Balkissoon, Bas	Fonseca, Peter	Qaadri, Shafiq
Best, Margaret	Jaczek, Helena	Ramal, Khalil
Broten, Laurel C.	Jeffrey, Linda	Ruprecht, Tony
Cansfield, Donna H.	Kular, Kuldip	Sergio, Mario
Caplan, David	Kwinter, Monte	Sousa, Charles
Colle, Mike	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Van Bommel, Maria
Delaney, Bob	Levac, Dave	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dhillon, Vic	Mangat, Amrit	Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 6; the nays are 30.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, I now call orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY REPORTING ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LE DEVOIR DE SIGNALER LES CAS DE PORNOGRAPHIE JUVÉNILE

Ms. Broten moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 37, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act to protect Ontario's children / Projet de loi 37, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille afin de protéger les enfants de l'Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Debate?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Ask any parent, and they will tell you there is nothing more important than the protection of their children. Bill 37, which we're debating on the floor of the Legislature this afternoon, recognizes our collective responsibility as legislators to protect, prevent further harm and be a strong voice for those children whose voices are often silenced.

If this bill is passed, it would require all Ontarians to report images of child abuse and sexual exploitation. Child pornography is a permanent evidentiary record of child abuse, and it is incumbent upon all of us to ensure

that if we come across one of these images, we report it. Under Bill 37, if passed, failure to do so will be an offence.

If you saw a child being abused on the street or suspected abuse in their home or in your neighbourhood, you would have an obligation to report that information. If this bill is passed and you see a child being abused, but the image comes to you through a computer screen, you still have an obligation to report it, because the abuse that that child is suffering, whether on the street or through the computer screen, is no less real, no less harmful and no less tragic. It is all those things, because it is an image of child abuse, clear and simple.

There is no form of child pornography that is not, in and of itself, illegal to hold, illegal to trade and absolutely a crime to commit. Child pornography is evidence of a crime against a child. If you receive that information, you must report it. You need to report it to allow those who work every single day across our province, across our country and around the world to protect our children. The image will be vile, shocking and horrific, but we cannot turn away. Do not stand by. We cannot be complicit in the crime we are witnessing.

The mandatory obligation to report, which would be imposed, takes away any confusion, provides clarity and leaves no question as to what our obligation and responsibility is to the children of this province. Whether you're a computer repair technician or someone who runs a network in a business, whether you're a neighbour, a babysitter or someone who is using another's home computer, it is not your responsibility to determine whether what you have observed is or is not child pornography, whether it is an image that is or is not illegal. If you believe it to be, your obligation, your responsibility is to report that information to agencies, be it law enforcement or child protection, such as cybertip.ca, who may be able to make sure that the child is protected and take the information and help to protect other children from around the world.

1630

I want to take a minute from the floor of the Legislature today to acknowledge those who have worked every single day across our province, across our country, to better protect children in Ontario. Paul Gillespie, who's the president of Kids' Internet Safety Alliance and a former Toronto police officer, has seen more horrific images than anyone can ever imagine, and Paul continues to be an important advocate on behalf of children. The Canadian Centre for Child Protection and their executive director, Lianna McDonald, have been very supportive of the proposed legislation and have helped bring it to fruition; the Canadian Centre for Abuse Awareness in Ontario, John Muise, the director of public safety, and Ellen Campbell, their president; Beyond Borders, Rosalind Prober and the great work that that organization is doing; the Gatehouse child abuse advocacy centre; the Ontario Provincial Police; the Toronto Police Service; the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, and in particular, their president, Chief Bill Blair.

Today, as we stand on the floor of the Legislature to debate this bill, we can know that Ontarians are with us in the importance placed by them on the protection of children. A Sun Media/Nanos Research poll from May 2008 found that 94% of Ontarians support the reporting of child pornography.

Aujourd'hui, laissez-nous travailler ensemble pour protéger les enfants de notre province. Par la mise en place d'un signalement obligatoire, ça va aider ceux qui travaillent pour protéger nos enfants chaque jour. Ils vont avoir l'information dont ils ont besoin pour pouvoir mettre en effet et vérifier le fait que les enfants sont le domaine le plus important de notre futur.

Today, in a strong and united voice, it is my hope this those on the floor of this Legislature will stand and take a step forward to protect Ontario's kids and kids around the world, to protect them from harm and abuse, because there is nothing more fundamental, there is no more fundamental responsibility of any society than to protect its children.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: We're voting for the bill, of course, and we agreed that this would be one of those bills of private members' public business that, at the end of a session prior to a recess, would be accelerated through the process as one of four that are going to be dealt with this afternoon.

This is in so many ways trite, because what person who stumbles across evidence of so heinous a crime wouldn't call the police? Having said that—

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That's faint praise.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Come on, Ms. Wynne. You know exactly what I'm talking about. This is the equivalent of the legislation that required emergency hospital room people to report gun wounds when the fact is that there wasn't a single incident reported to the committee that examined that of admission of a person who had a gun wound where the nursing staff or the medical staff didn't report it.

So here we are. The proposition reinforces and underscores our sense of repugnance around child pornography, around abuse and exploitation of children, but at the end of the day, with respect, the bill is going to do little to protect children. People who witness these crimes, I'm convinced, do report them. People who witness them and don't report them—how are the police going to know? Because they weren't reported. Do you see the Catch-22 there, Ms. Gélinas? If they don't disclose, if they don't report, then the police are never going to find out. So in that respect, there's some dilemma around the enforceability or the efficacy of the legislation.

Having said that, we commend Ms. Broten for her efforts in this. We see this, as I say, as a collective expression of repugnance around abuse of children and a call by this Legislature upon all Ontarians to play a role in protecting children.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm pleased to rise today in support of this bill, a bill that protects the children of Ontario. Child protection is a very serious matter; it is serious to everybody in this House and it is serious to everybody in this province. It's probably serious to everybody in this country and all over the world. It is horrific that one can find images on the Internet and elsewhere of children being abused.

In my previous work, I've had the opportunity to work with families and children who have been abused. I've seen the devastation to those children's and families' lives. I've also worked with the abusers, to try to turn their lives around. It makes for a lot of misery and a lot of hardship. Anything that will work toward preventing those horrific crimes from happening is something that I will support.

This bill is looking at ways to stop the abuse that is coming from the Internet. It is a bill that can proactively prevent children from being abused, and I don't think there's anybody in this room who does not understand that this is a bill worth supporting.

Il me fait plaisir aujourd'hui de parler en faveur du projet de loi 37, la loi pour protéger les enfants. J'ai eu l'expérience dans ma vie antérieure de travailler avec des enfants et des familles qui ont vécu la violence et qui ont vécu l'abus, et les effets terribles que cela a eu sur ces familles-là et sur ces enfants-là. J'ai également eu l'expérience de travailler avec les « abuseurs ». Puis ça non plus, ce n'était pas plus gai.

C'est le genre de projet de loi qui était mis de l'avant par le membre de Etobicoke-Lakeshore et qui parle de la promotion de la prévention de ces actes, surtout lorsqu'ils sont distribués sur Internet. C'est le genre de loi proactive qui va protéger les enfants et qui demande l'appui de tous les membres de cette Chambre.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? Seeing none, Ms. Broten has moved third reading of Bill 37.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Orders of the day.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to call the remaining orders in the following order: M124, M111, M98.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Do we have unanimous consent to call the orders in that order? Agreed.

The honourable minister.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I call M124, An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act with respect to cigarillos.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The Deputy Clerk reminds me that the unanimous consent was to do M111, M124 and M98 in that order. So, would you like to call M111, Minister of Education?

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Speaker: With respect, if it hasn't already been sought and obtained, consent to varying the order as indicated in the earlier motion agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Okay. Do I have unanimous consent to vary the order? Agreed.

The honourable minister has called—oh, whatever you want.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'd like to call M124, An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act with respect to cigarillos.

SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO
AMENDMENT ACT (CIGARILLOS), 2008
LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT
LA LOI FAVORISANT
UN ONTARIO SANS FUMÉE
(CIGARILLOS)

M^{me} Gélinas, on behalf of Mr. Levac, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 124, An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act with respect to cigarillos / Projet de loi 124, Loi modifiant la Loi favorisant un Ontario sans fumée en ce qui a trait aux cigarillos.

1640

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is an honour to rise before this House today to speak on Bill 124, which will ban the sale of flavoured and individually sold cigarillos that are targeted at children. I'm ecstatic, as an MPP, that MPPs from all sides of this Legislature have come together in support of my very first private member's bill.

Applause.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you. It is a bill that will help to protect the health of our children.

I send a special thank you to Dave Levac, the member from Brant, who has co-sponsored this bill with me. I also want to thank the many groups who have supported this bill. They include the Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco, the Ontario Lung Association, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, the Ontario Medical Association, the Non-Smokers' Rights Association, and the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.

I came to Queen's Park to make a difference in the lives and the health of Ontarians. After being here for over a year now, I feel that I have been able to create some positive change, and this is something that means a lot to me and certainly brings me a great sense of fulfillment.

I know that private members' bills very rarely become law in Ontario, but the passage of Bill 124 today in the Legislature I guess shows that with hard work and perseverance, this kind of job can be done. I look forward to working with the Ministry of Health Promotion to ensure that Bill 124 is implemented because, as I tried to do in committee this morning but wasn't quite successful—the government did not agree to a proclamation date, which

was in the bill, as is usually the case, especially the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, which came with dates on it. Rest assured, I will continue to hold the ministry's feet to the fire and make sure that we do get a proclamation.

That said, for me, today is a day of celebration. Together, we are calling for immediate action on cigarillos and sending a clear message that new regulations must close the gap in Ontario anti-smoking policies. Together, today, we will help prevent a new generation of young people from becoming smokers, a new generation of young people that could have filled up the ranks of the 60,000 Ontarians a year who die because they became addicted to tobacco products. We are protecting the health of children, and this is something we should all be proud of and celebrate. For that, I'm really proud and I thank everybody.

J'aimerais remercier les gens qui ont parlé en appui et qui nous ont aidé à mettre de l'avant le projet de loi 124, un projet de loi qui va empêcher la vente de cigarillos à l'unité et les différentes saveurs.

C'est mon premier projet de loi et il me fait extrêmement plaisir qu'il va aller de l'avant pour devenir loi. J'aimerais remercier tous ceux qui y ont travaillé.

Thank you. Merci.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Merci. Further debate?

Mr. Dave Levac: I have to start with a thank you to the member from Nickel Belt, not only for her determination to see this bill through and her first introduction of a private member's bill, but also to her and her staff for their co-operation, their goodwill and their trust. Far too often in this place we have lost that capacity to look each other in the eye and say, "We're going to make this work." So it was an honour to work with her, and the other organizations, on the importance of this particular piece of legislation.

We need to point out that this was all based on a loophole. Just because there was a loophole in our first attempt to make us smoke-free, somebody found that loophole and they went from selling 50,000 units in Canada in 2001 to selling 80 million units in 2006. You cannot tell me that this wasn't about getting kids hooked. So I want to thank the member. I appreciate her passion and I want to tell her that the government understands the importance of this bill. The government has said, with all of the things they've done, under the circumstances we face today, we are committed to getting the bill proclaimed, and let me give you just a small example of why.

It has indicated its willingness to move on the bill once the provincial offences have been completed—and properly trained and the preparations for the transition have been made. So we needed to find ourselves some room in order for us to proclaim it. It has something to do with the fact that the federal government has indicated that it wants to do something. But there are amendments in that bill that allow us to proceed once that portion is done, and then we can change the regulations. Because of the amendments that you accepted, when the feds get

their act together, we can coordinate that. So the reality of this particular piece of legislation is that's the indication.

I want to also thank very clearly the Ontario Lung Association; the Canadian Cancer Society; the Heart and Stroke Foundation; Smoke-Free Ontario; Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco; the University of Waterloo smoking survey, which gave us the inside information that some people are professing doesn't exist; the doctors for Smoke-Free Ontario; the Brant County Health Unit; smoke-free Brant. I've got to tell you, there are enough people lined up to say that it is about time for us to do this.

I want to compliment the member, and I want to compliment the members who have joined us in the gallery today from the those organizations for their determination to keep our kids healthy. Thank you very much. We've taken another step in smoke-free Ontario, and there's more to do. Thank you very much, Minister.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: As the Minister of Health Promotion, I am proud to support Bill 124. I take this opportunity to congratulate the MPP for Nickel Belt and my colleague the MPP for Brant for the work they have done on Bill 124. If passed, this bill will go a long way to help protect our children and youth from the dangers associated with tobacco use.

I also want to thank all the stakeholders and supporters. We have come a long way since the Smoke-Free Ontario Act became law on May 31, 2006. This is indeed another step that has been taken to protect the future of Ontario: our children, our youth.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I tell you that we in the NDP are so very proud of our member from Nickel Belt, France Gélinas, not just for this piece of legislation, which is a very important one—and I'll explain why in just a minute—but for her tenacious commitment to healthy Ontarians and to adequate levels of health care. She has in short order, but a year and change since her election here, established a formidable presence at Queen's Park and across the province as the NDP health critic.

These cigarillos that we're talking about aren't Old Port cigarillos that many of the folks who are my age would imagine. I don't get ruffled too often, but these things actually shocked and horrified me. They were very tiny tobacco cigarillo products, candy-flavoured, in candy-coloured containers, small in diameter, for little kids to smoke. It was incredible—Ms. Gélinas gives them to me. It's just shocking that the purveyors of death who manufacture these and then market them—again, it's clear this is marketed toward little kids, in the same way that soda pop, liquor—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. I'd ask the honourable member to take his seat for a moment. I'd just remind the honourable member that you can't use props in the House. I'd ask you to put it away, please.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Perhaps the Sergeant at Arms can seize these from me, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Can you just put it away? Thank you.

The honourable member from Welland has the floor.

Mr. Peter Kormos: They are a very insidious product. They're the parallel of the candy-flavoured liquors and so on that are designed to lure young kids into drinking.

I have the highest regard for advocates, for zealots, like Ms. Gélinas, who is zealous in her campaign against smoking.

1650

I say that this assembly has this challenge to meet: When will this assembly make the Queen's Park precinct a tobacco-free zone? Notwithstanding all of the education, notwithstanding all of the purported leadership, when you walk in the east entrance or when you walk in the west entrance, you walk through a cloud of tobacco smoke. And you walk through the rubbish, the detritus of, quite frankly, slovenly smokers. If there's anything worse than a smoker who subjects other people to their smoking—I'm an ex-smoker—it's smokers who are pathetically piggish in leaving their garbage behind.

When will this assembly accept the challenge to make this Queen's Park island a smoke-free, tobacco-free zone? That is the next challenge. That would be leadership.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Seeing none, Ms. Gélinas has moved third reading of Bill 124. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

EMANCIPATION DAY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LE JOUR DE L'ÉMANCIPATION

Mrs. Van Bommel moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 111, An Act to proclaim Emancipation Day /
Projet de loi 111, Loi proclamant le Jour de l'émancipation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Debate?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I'm very pleased to be able to speak today to Bill 111, which, if passed, will proclaim August 1 of every year as Emancipation Day. I will be sharing my time with the Minister of Health Promotion, who also wants to have an opportunity to speak to this bill.

But I'm especially honoured to have co-sponsored this private member's bill with the member for Wellington-Halton Hills, Ted Arnott. It's a great testament to a provincial Legislature that enables two members from opposing parties to reach across the aisles and introduce the first-ever co-sponsored bill in this legislative history.

Mr. Arnott and I understand that this bill is a poignant reminder of an unfortunate past, but it is also a celebration of hardships and the people who overcame them as they tried to work their way out of slavery and risked their lives in order to overcome oppression.

I want to speak today in particular about two communities in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex where this history is particularly significant. Just outside the town of Dresden, in the former township of Dawn, stands Uncle Tom's Cabin. The museum is built on the site of the black settlement that Reverend Josiah Henson established in 1841. That museum recounts the history of the Underground Railroad and the role played by Reverend Henson in bringing other enslaved African-Americans to freedom in Canada. Reverend Henson and his wife, Nancy, lived there, raised their children and did their outreach from this house. Reverend Henson escaped slavery by fleeing northwards with his wife and four children from Maryland in the United States, eventually crossing the Niagara River into Upper Canada on October 28, 1830.

Upper Canada had become a haven for black refugees like Reverend Henson after Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe had passed An Act to prevent further introduction of Slaves and to limit the terms of contracts for servitude within this Province in 1793. Although the legislation didn't free slaves living in Canada, it prohibited the importation of slaves into the province. This meant that refugees from slavery were free as soon as they set foot in Ontario.

Today, thousands of people make pilgrimages to the Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site to discover more about a part of our history that I feel is relatively unknown to most of us. Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site takes its name from Harriet Beecher Stowe's successful anti-slavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, featuring a character that is based on Josiah Henson's life; the character's name was Tom. Reverend Henson actually was very proud and in his autobiography speaks about the fact that he was proud to be known as Uncle Tom.

The second community I want to speak about is Wilberforce. It is also in my riding, or was at one time. Wilberforce was located in close proximity to the community of Lucan, north of the city of London. The community was established by a group of African-Americans fleeing the violence of Cincinnati, Ohio, and was named in honour of William Wilberforce, known as "The Liberator" for his nearly two-decade effort to end slavery in the British empire. Just three days before Wilberforce died, the British House of Commons finally passed the British Emancipation Act, on August 1, 1833. He lived long enough to know that the first organized all-black settlement had been named for him and that his abolitionist efforts had succeeded. Although the settlement of Wilberforce lasted only 10 years, it still became a symbol and inspiration for antislavery and abolitionist causes.

While there is little to mark their passing, the story of the early black settlers deserves to be told and remembered. African-American refugees came to Ontario with

hopes and dreams. Today, Ontario residents can take pride in the fact that their province has often been the refuge to those who sought a better life for themselves and their descendants. It is time this province establishes a day to pay tribute to the history of Ontario's black community and their struggle for emancipation. This day will give opportunity for all Ontarians to reflect on an important time and part of our history—a day to remember people like Reverend Henson, Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe and William Wilberforce, and a day to remember all those who were impacted by the oppression of slavery. I encourage my colleagues on all sides of the House to join with the member from Wellington-Halton Hills, Mr. Arnott, and myself in having Emancipation Day proclaimed in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? The co-sponsor of the bill, the member from Wellington-Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I was honoured to move second reading of Bill 111 this morning, and I should begin my remarks this afternoon by complimenting my colleague the member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, Maria Van Bommel, for her willingness to work with me on this bill, the very first co-sponsored bill to be introduced in the history of the Ontario Legislature. I know that without her involvement this bill would not have been called for third reading today. I should also express my sincere appreciation to all of the members of this House because without their support this bill cannot pass into law today.

I know that my colleague the member for Welland, Peter Kormos, strongly supports Bill 111, and I thank him for that. I wish to acknowledge Michael Wood of legislative counsel, who helped us with the drafting of Bill 111; Helen Chong of the legislative library, who assisted us with background research; and our friend Alvin Curling, the former Speaker of this Legislature, who was very helpful in expressing his support. My legislative assistant, Stephen Yantzi, has worked hard on this issue along with me, and Dr. Alex Roman, who works with Frank Klees, has provided us with encouragement and outstanding advice since the day this bill was introduced.

My involvement in this issue began last summer, on August 2, when I attended a particularly meaningful and moving ceremony in the community of Glen Allan in Mapleton township in Wellington county. On that day, I joined former Lieutenant Governor Lincoln Alexander to help unveil an Ontario Heritage Trust plaque to commemorate the Queen's Bush settlement. The best way to tell the story is to share the eloquent words that are written on that plaque. The plaque says this:

"In the early 19th century, the vast unsettled area between Waterloo county and Lake Huron was known as the 'Queen's Bush.' More than 1,500 free and formerly enslaved blacks pioneered scattered farms throughout the Queen's Bush, starting in about 1820. Many settled along the Peel and Wellesley township border with Glen Allan, Hawkesville and Wallenstein as important centres. Working together, these industrious and self-reliant settlers

built churches, schools, and a strong and vibrant community life. American missionaries taught local black children at the Mount Hope and Mount Pleasant schools. In the 1840s the government ordered the district surveyed and many of the settlers could not afford to purchase the land that they had laboured so hard to clear. By 1850, migration out of the Queen's Bush had begun. Today African-Canadians whose ancestors pioneered the Queen's Bush are represented in communities across Ontario."

Just as I was leaving the ceremony that day, a man I didn't know approached me to say that August 1 should be recognized as Emancipation Day in Ontario. While driving home, I couldn't stop thinking about what he'd said. I decided to look into it further, and I asked legislative counsel to draft the legislation.

1700

When our standing orders were changed to allow members of different parties to co-sponsor bills, I thought this idea was perfect for this new opportunity we have, as members, to work together across party lines.

I was very pleased when the member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex agreed to work with me on this, because I know her support has been absolutely instrumental in getting this bill to third reading.

I was also impressed when I found out that the Ontario Black History Society has been advocating for a bill like Bill 111 for several years. It was fitting that their president, Dr. Rosemary Sadlier, was here for first reading on October 15, and I'm sure all members will join me in welcoming her here today.

Applause.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Rosemary's lifelong hard work on behalf of our African-Canadian community merits special recognition from all of us.

By supporting Bill 111 at third reading, members have a chance to participate in a historic act that celebrates one of our core Canadian values, the value of tolerance. The bill symbolizes our continued determination to eliminate discrimination in all its forms, and our continued commitment to strengthen our country, bringing all our citizens together as one.

It can also be said that Bill 111 is our Legislature's tribute to a great parliamentarian of the 19th century, William Wilberforce. As a British member of Parliament, he led the fight against slavery but, sadly, died just a few months short of seeing the scourge of slavery abolished throughout the British Empire in 1834. It was Wilberforce's student, our own John Graves Simcoe, who brought his mentor's passionate vision for a just and equal society, free of racism, to Upper Canada as our first Lieutenant Governor.

Simcoe's first priority as LG was to introduce a legislative agenda to end slavery. The Ontario Heritage Trust website tells us that Simcoe initially "proposed the outright abolition of slavery. However, the Legislative Assembly opposed this proposal because many Loyalists brought enslaved people with them to Upper Canada after the American Revolution. As a compromise, Sim-

coe passed legislation that allowed for gradual abolition: Slaves already in the province would remain enslaved until their death, no new slaves could be brought into Upper Canada, and children born to female slaves would be freed at age 25. This act was the first to limit slavery in the British Empire and remained in force until 1833, when the Emancipation Act abolished slavery throughout the British Empire, including Ontario."

Bill 111 also celebrates the many African-Canadian Loyalists who arrived here, beginning in 1793, to escape oppression in the United States.

We acknowledge the heroism of Harriet Tubman, who was one of the great conductors of the Underground Railroad. She single-handedly brought over 800 former slaves to freedom in the Dominion of Canada, despite her own failing health and without fear of threatened reprisals against her by the American government of the day.

Any discussion of Bill 111 should also include recognition of the great African-Canadian figures in contemporary times, such as the former Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, the Honourable Lincoln Alexander.

In summary, Bill 111, in its recognition of Emancipation Day, celebrates the hard-won values of freedom and equality that we have achieved here. It is a clarion call to redouble our efforts to make these values felt around the globe.

This bill, if passed, recognizes the extraordinarily positive contribution of African-Canadians in the life of our great province. Their pride is justified.

I encourage all members to support Bill 111.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: As the sole African-Canadian in the Ontario Legislature, and in recognition of the dreams of Dr. Martin Luther King, the Ontario Black History Society and Ms. Rosemary Sadlier, it is certainly a privilege for me to rise in this Legislature in support of Bill 111.

I look forward to the day when I can celebrate Emancipation Day on August 1 each year, and I thank my colleague from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex and the member from Wellington-Halton Hills for their work with this bill.

It is truly a great day for me to be here, and I know that I feel, just by being here, that Martin Luther King's dream is indeed a reality. Yet there is still more to be done, and we look forward to it.

Applause.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: New Democrats are pleased, proud and honoured to be able to support this bill, this proposition, this oh so modest proposal. I applaud the authors of the bill, and I applaud the community that has struggled to make this legislation a reality.

One can't talk about slavery in North America without talking about racism, and one can't talk about emancipation from the slavery of chains, only then to be

enslaved by the slavery of racism. Just this morning in the New York Times, I read the obituary of Odetta. Those of our generation, Ms. Wynne, recall being inspired by her as one of the songstresses of the civil rights movement in the United States. The struggle of black Americans and black Canadians didn't end upon emancipation, when the latifundia economy in the United States was collapsing, capitalism in the northern United States was emerging and a civil war purported to free the slaves only to create wage slaves.

I have bragging rights too, because I come from down in the Niagara region, and that was yet another one of the rails of the Underground Railroad. I grew up with a family—there are historic black Canadian families in Welland and St. Catharines that are descendants of either enslaved blacks in Canada or escaped slaves from the United States.

Harriet Tubman preached in St. Catharines; the church is still there. I visit it often, and it's still a black-Canadian congregation which, of course, has many friends throughout the community.

William Hamilton Merritt, the entrepreneur who engineered the Welland Canal, was also one of the great and leading Canadian abolitionists. We down there, of course, take great pride in the Welland Canal, and I take even greater pride that a personality like Merritt, more importantly and more significantly than being a builder of great engineering feats, was one of the members of the vanguard of the abolitionist movement.

We can't talk about this celebration in Canada without talking about the reality of slavery in so many parts of the world today. I hope that our recognition of Emancipation Day in Canada and what it means for black Canadians and their descendants also causes us to reflect upon the imperative that we commit ourselves to addressing slavery that prevails in so many parts of the world today.

You see, slavery is not ancient history. There are still families in Canada for whom slavery is so close generationally that they can tell the stories of that family's great-great-grandparents and their struggles, just like there are families in the United States who can identify enslaved antecedents, enslaved ancestors.

That creates a very special circumstance, because a society of culture can't just declare emancipation and then relieve itself of all the responsibility for having deprived generations—because one of the things that black slavery in North America did was steal from those people their histories: their family histories, their cultural histories. It stole from those people any sense of their roots, their origins, and that perhaps is far crueller than any shackles, far crueller than any brutality that was inflicted upon them. I trust you know some of the things that were done to escapees: hobbled, Achilles tendons cut, some beaten. Of course there was great passion: Most slave owners, because slaves were property—they were chattels—would ensure that that slave remained fertile if she was to have children, not for herself, of course, but literally for a market in a marketplace. And if that slave was going to work in fields or produce value

for that slave owner, that slave was maintained the same way we might maintain a car or a draft horse. But all that does is underscore the inhumanity.

1710

We also have to reflect upon the fact that generations of good Christians defended slavery, declared it to have Biblical justification, and insisted that emancipation was in and of itself contrary to God's will. This attitude, this perspective, was supported by many.

So we reflect upon these things, not because we want to weary ourselves with that recollection, but because we want to prepare ourselves for the struggle that continues.

I'm old enough, like Ms. Wynne, although I'm a little older than her, to remember, as a young person, witnessing the great civil rights movement—not the 1960s; the 1950s. She and I watched black and white television, she and I read Life magazine, she and I read newspaper headlines, and saw the courage of those civil rights leaders. Oh, not Jesse Jackson, but Rosa Parks; oh, not Ralph Abernathy—we recall the images, don't we, Ms. Wynne?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We do.

Mr. Peter Kormos: The Bull Connor attacks on plain folks, hard-working folks; Goodman, Schwerner and Chaney, who were slaughtered because they came from the north to help organize those people. That wasn't that long ago at all, was it?

This isn't ancient history; it's current history, and the struggle is a current one too.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Seeing none, Mrs. Van Bommel has moved third reading of Bill 111. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Third reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

SIGNAGE TO PROMOTE
ONTARIO PRODUCED
AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR L'AFFICHAGE
VISANT À PROMOUVOIR
LES PRODUITS AGRICOLES ONTARIENS

Mr. Hardeman moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 98, An Act to promote the sale of Ontario produced agricultural products by amending the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act / Projet de loi 98, Loi visant à promouvoir la vente de produits agricoles ontariens en modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement des voies publiques et des transports en commun.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Hardeman.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: This bill—I was going to say “if passed,” but I'm going to say “when passed”; I think

we should think of this on a positive note—allows farmers to erect signs to do what all Ontarians want them to do, which is to connect farmers with the eaters or the consumers in the province of Ontario.

I would also like to thank all the members of the Legislature who voted for this bill on second reading and who then supported the process in getting it through to be called back for third reading, which is not something that happens very often with private members' bills and which I'm happy to see. On behalf of all the farmers who will benefit from this bill, I want to thank the members of the Legislature.

I also want to thank Chuck Emre, an asparagus grower in Norfolk riding. Our colleague Toby Barrett represents that area. He had a sign and it was taken down because, under the Highway Traffic Act, it was not allowed to be where it was. It had been there for a number of years, but it was taken down because it was an infraction of the law. That's what prompted the introduction of this bill. I want to thank him for helping me design a bill that would solve his problem.

I'd like to take the time that I have to speak to this bill to point out the benefits that this bill will present to rural Ontario and to agriculture in this province by going through some of the letters of support that I received after we got second reading of the bill.

The first one is from Brenda Lammens. She is the chair of the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association. The applicable part in the letter reads:

"The ability to erect a directional sign on privately owned, agriculturally zoned land makes sense for farmers and consumers. The intent is simple: to link consumers with fresh, locally produced food that might otherwise be hard to find on country side roads.

"With current government policies promoting 'Buy local' and Pick Ontario Freshness, this proposed legislation enables farmers to leverage that awareness into actual purchases at the farm gate. With those financial rewards, farmers remain viable and sustainable. This legislation is very practical, allowing farmers to do what they do best" as stewards of soil and water.

Another one, from the president of Local Food Plus: "We at Local Food Plus bring farmers and consumers to the table to share in the benefits of environmentally and socially responsible food production. We know first-hand the incredible demand for local food and the challenges consumers face, finding and purchasing Ontario-grown product.

"We also strongly support increasing the economic sustainability of Ontario farmers and we believe Bill 98 will help to accomplish just that."

We have a letter from Neil Currie. Neil Currie is the general manager of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the largest organization representing farmers in Ontario. They are, he says, very appreciative of "your efforts to reduce red tape and help farmers promote their products through appropriate highway signage.

"The bill is also an important one for our consumers, who get frustrated in not being able to locate local

producers. The demand for local food is growing, and your private members' bill will certainly help facilitate this phenomenon." That's from the largest farm organization in the province.

We have another farm organization in the province, the National Farmers Union, and its chair, or its—I don't believe he's the chair, but Grant Robertson from the Ontario farmers' union: "We would encourage all members of the Legislature to vote for passage of private members' Bill 98. For those members who are willing to stand with you and Ontario's farmers, it is a small step to say we recognize the important contribution farm families make to our economic well-being and the health of Ontarians." That's from the farmers' union.

We have one here, an interesting one from 4-H Ontario. These are the young people in Ontario who are aspiring to become food producers: "... we are seeing a great deal of investment into the awareness and support of consumers' awareness and producers' investments toward the connection of agriculture to food to health. This bill addresses on a very practical level the 'access' issue for consumers to easily find the 'local' food they are being encouraged to incorporate into their healthy diet choices, and local community economic health." Thank you very much to 4-H of Ontario for putting those comments on the record.

Another one here, from the Niagara Peninsula Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association—I just want to read one line out of theirs: "Growers need to be freed from red tape and be allowed to market their crops in ways that are profitable." To that end, the Niagara Peninsula Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association supports this bill.

From the Ontario Berry Growers Association: The Ontario berry growers are "pleased to see the bill entitled Signage to Promote Ontario Grown Products Act. We agree that this bill would benefit our members by allowing them to post signs adjacent to provincial highways. Our industry has a great tradition of on-farm sales and this bill would help ensure the tradition continues."

These are just some of the comments of the people who will be using this bill, and that's why I'm proud to stand here today and, on their behalf, thank this Legislature for the support thus far and hopefully ask for support for third reading of this bill so they can actually put it into practice.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me these few moments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I first of all want to congratulate the member from Oxford. I think for most farmers this would be a no-brainer.

I'm particularly pleased to be able to say that I again support, as I myself, enjoy farm products. As a farmer, I'm always willing to promote the farm gate sales.

I think that, as was pointed out in a number of your letters, it's important for us to be able to locate these farms as we move forward with our Foodland Ontario and our "buy local" strategies. We not only need the con-

sumers to buy them, but we need them to be able to find them, too.

So congratulations, and of course, again, I support the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I'm pleased to, on behalf of New Democrats here at Queen's Park, support this legislation.

I tell you, Speaker, Ernie Hardeman is good. He's a good MPP. He's as strong a voice for farmers in this Legislature as anybody could ever want, and his constituents should be very proud of him and the work that he does on their behalf here.

1720

This modest proposal contained in Bill 98 has the capacity to do more to advance farmers' interests—farmers who are struggling against both federal and provincial government policies that are hostile to farmers—than any government policy of the last five years. I mean that. I think that's true.

I know all about farming. Down where I come from in Niagara region, we've got fruit farmers, we've got apple orchards, we've got vineyards, we've got cattle producers, we've got chicken producers. And we increasingly have people producing artisanal produce—small crops, many times restoring varieties of tomatoes, for instance—that is not the stuff that's designed to look uniform and ship for 15 days and spend thousands of miles on the rails and roadways as it comes up from California. Have you ever eaten some artisanal tomatoes? They're not as pretty—actually, I find them beautiful—because they're wrinkly and all different colours, not red, but they also don't taste like cardboard. We have producers reviving other forms of fruits and vegetables that would have been lost were it not for these people preserving these strains. And we have farmers who are being denied access to the supermarkets, the chains—Galen Weston. You see his ads on television for—what chain is that?

Interjection: Loblaws.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Loblaws, for Pete's sake.

You see Galen Weston prancing around, talking about Loblaws this and Loblaws that. Shame on him, because Loblaws could provide real leadership in terms of food supply by committing itself—not just paying lip service—to 100% Ontario produce in season and charging a fair enough price so that the farmer doesn't have to subsidize the consumer.

Down where I come from, and I suspect where Mr. Hardeman comes from, farmers' spouses are paying the bills—whether it's a wife who works as a teacher or as a nurse, or whether it's a husband who is still fortunate enough to have a job in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario—because the farm doesn't generate profits. The farmer can start to compensate for that at the farm gate.

Some of us remember days gone by when a Saturday afternoon or a Sunday afternoon involved travelling from farm to farm—and I'm not talking about in the most remote parts of the world; I'm talking about Niagara region, Ontario—where you went to the egg guy and you got your eggs and you knew they were fresh and you

knew they were good. How did you know? Because there was a little bit of straw and chicken manure still stuck to the outside. That's how you know, isn't it? That egg came right out from underneath that chicken. Or you travelled Highway 20 or Highway 8 down in Niagara region, and you bought tomatoes or you bought cherries or you bought rhubarb or asparagus. What could beat fresh asparagus in the springtime, in asparagus season?

This bill will enable those farmers to now provide an arrow pointing people to where they are. It will also facilitate agri-tourism. We in the NDP believe that while agri-tourism is never going to be a replacement for productive farming, agri-tourism can constitute a strong new component to the rural economy. Agri-tourism can also expose urban people to the realities of farm production.

I'm convinced that if a few more downtown Toronto types in those high-rise towers up on Hazelton Lanes got to see what farmers had to do to produce the food they eat, they'd be more prepared to support farmers, not only as consumers, but as taxpayers, in ensuring that both their provincial and federal governments develop policies that allow farmers to survive.

We support this bill enthusiastically. I look forward to the signage emerging, popping up like mushrooms, I suppose one might say, Mr. Hardeman, down in Niagara region. I, for the life of me, can't understand why it took so long. Thank goodness Mr. Hardeman had the initiative and the insight and obviously the support from farming folk down where he comes from to bring this bill forward.

This is one of those bills that was agreed upon by all three parties at the end of a session. It's a private member's bill. Private members' bills rarely see the light of day. Quite frankly, there's a little bit of horse-trading that goes on between the House leaders, and the caucuses have to nominate which of their bills are going to be prioritized. Vetoes can occur with any one of the three caucuses, and sometimes it just doesn't work out. But we worked hard this fall, this winter, because there was good stuff before the Legislature, and Ernie Hardeman's bill was one of those. That's why the New Democrats, along with the Conservatives, wanted to ensure that the bill was brought forward.

That's why there isn't the protracted debate. I wish there were, because I couldn't think of anything better that we could do than to raise consciousness of the plight of farmers in this province and to raise consciousness of the need for consumers of farm product to support their local farmers, to not buy imported product, to understand that the local farm produce is better—better for them and better for local economies. But in the course of the horse-trading that goes on, we agree to abbreviate debate, and that's why I had but seven minutes. I feel shortchanged. I feel as if I've lost something. I've lost 43 minutes of my life that I would have had, had this been a full one-hour lead. But having said that, I'm more than prepared to make that sacrifice to see this legislation become law.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Hardeman has moved third

reading of Bill 98. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Third reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Be it resolved that bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Orders of the day.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This House stands adjourned until next Monday, December 8, at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1727.

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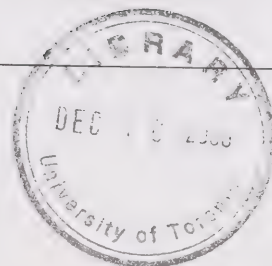
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Monday 8 December 2008

Lundi 8 décembre 2008

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Honourable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 8 December 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 8 décembre 2008

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a Baha'i prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm very honoured and privileged to have my fourth page in my time as an MPP—my page is Jason Fernandes—and I'm pleased to introduce his family here today: his mom, Michelle Fernandes; his dad, Allan Fernandes; and his sister, Stephanie Fernandes. They are sitting in the public gallery. Please welcome them.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: It is indeed my pleasure today to welcome Cindy Leithead here with her daughter and her husband, Iain and Tara Holovac. Welcome.

Hon. Michael Chan: I want to acknowledge Kush Thaker, his uncle Dave Hemant and cousin Dave Vrajesh. They are here today. Thank you very much.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of page Sarah Ratzlaff, we'd like to welcome to the galleries today her mother, Carol Ratzlaff; her father, Brad Ratzlaff, and her brother, Sam Ratzlaff. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development. Last Friday, Stats Canada announced that in November alone, Ontario lost 66,000 jobs, raising the unemployment rate by over half a per cent to 7.1% and making Ontario's unemployment rate almost a full percentage higher than the national average. In Quebec, a manufacturing economy like ours, they broke even. Everywhere in Confederation losses were mild, but under your watch, Ontario was plunged into a severe employment crisis. You have four days left before the long break. Minister, what immediate action will you take to make Ontario competitive again?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The federal finance minister, I think, referred to those numbers as devastating. I agree. Those unemployment numbers are very, very tough on the families affected, especially at this time of the year.

For those families who have either faced layoffs or fear layoffs, it's a very, very difficult time.

We do have, as the member alluded to, a situation where Quebec and Ontario are sharing the same unemployment level. In part, that's a function of the fact that the industries that dominate in Ontario and Quebec have been particularly hard hit by the global economic crisis. This is the case not only in Ontario, but with respect to the manufacturing industry in China, Southeast Asia and around the world. But, obviously, these numbers are nothing but—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It's too bad that there's no sense of urgency on this government to act. Yes, we understand the problem. The minister understands the problem, but he defends the failed policies of his predecessor and I don't understand why. This minister has been in place now for some period of time. Is he too timid to introduce his own changes?

Let's talk about one failed jobs program in particular, the much-touted Next Generation of Jobs Fund, which invests taxpayers' money into individual businesses—a reckless strategy that is consistently called unwise by economic experts. Nonetheless, you have slated \$1.5 billion for this program. So after one year how is it working out? You have spent \$27 million of that total \$1.5 billion, or .03%. You have created an estimated 167 jobs with three companies. Minister, is this the McGuinty economic plan?

Hon. Michael Bryant: We had a very interesting concession by the member who, to be fair, is admitting his view and the view of his party and the official opposition, which is that they oppose governments investing dollars in companies or in industries in order to leverage greater investment and in order to leverage greater jobs. That's why when we brought in the Next Generation of Jobs Fund, the Conservatives voted against it.

On this side of the House, we believe in these investments as being, in fact, the way in which we are going to grow our economy, particularly during this troubled time. I say to the member, as I stood at the opening of the plant for Toyota last Thursday there were literally thousands of people cheering for the investments that this government had made to create—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Minister, you have invested money in the auto industry and the auto industry has continuously laid off programs. Small business is the

core of this province's job creation, and you have invested nothing with small business in Ontario—nothing. That's where a lot of your problems are coming from. This House is set to rise and not return for two months or more with thousands more jobs set to disappear during that time. Minister, you need to make decisions now and it's about your wants and needs. Ontario needs some decisions right now, not your wants—that you want to continue to spend money recklessly. Now is the time you have to start leading by example. No more fancy hotels, no more expensive conference rooms, no more waste, period. When you save, you save taxpayers, and it's just that simple. We outlined last week, in question after question, the waste this government has gone through. Will you cut back your luxurious spending and use that money for a new jobs plan? Will you try to help our unemployed and vulnerable—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Michael Bryant: On the one hand, the member says that we should be, in fact, cutting public spending and then taking that money and putting it into the jobs plans—the jobs plans that, in the previous question, he said he's against. This is the approach of the Conservatives. They want to cut and they want to spend; they want to cut and they want to spend. What we are going to do on this side of the House is, in fact, take—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Honourable member, you just asked the question. I'd ask that you listen to the response, please.

Hon. Michael Bryant: We are going to take the hard-earned tax dollars of the people of Ontario and we are going to make sure that every single dollar that's invested is a positive investment. But we will invest it in order to create millions of dollars of additional investment and thousands of jobs. That has been our plan, that is our plan and that will be our plan in the future, and that will mean more jobs for the province of Ontario.

1040

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Finance. We have heard that the federal government intends to introduce its budget shortly after its return to Parliament on January 26. I'm asking you, Minister, will you commit to the people in this province that you will bring in your own budget within two weeks of the federal budget?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Well, there is a question as to whether or not that federal budget would even pass. What I can assure the member is this: We won't conduct ourselves the way the Harper government did. We will focus on stimulus. I will be wrapping up my pre-budget consultations this week. Unfortunately, we had to pass a motion to compel them to get out and do their pre-budget consultations. We will bring in a budget with the appropriate stimulus package, in addition to what we're doing

in this budget—the infrastructure investments which the member opposite voted against. Let me assure the member, we will not—I repeat, not—conduct ourselves the way the Harper government's conducted itself in these matters.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: This is not a time for partisan politics. People in this province are concerned about their jobs. They are concerned about their pensions. As Murray Campbell said in the *Globe and Mail* today, it makes you wonder whether this government and its leader are in fact sleepwalking through this crisis. I certainly hope not.

This House is set to rise in four days. It could be nine weeks or longer before we come back to work. Minister, the pre-budget consultations are going to be done earlier. Why will you not commit to bring the House back early and bring in a budget two weeks after the federal budget?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I have a number of consultations set up for next week, including the final large public pre-budget consultation in my home community of Windsor. I will be in the member's community meeting with some business leaders and labour leaders and others.

Again, I want to assure the House that we will not conduct ourselves the way the Harper government has conducted itself on the economy. We saw a federal fall statement in which the principal commitment was to reduce party funding. I can assure the member we're not looking at that. We are looking at making the investments in infrastructure. I remind the member that the federal government does not give Ontario its equal share. We are going to do more on that. We will continue with targeted tax cuts to assist businesses and individuals to move forward. I urge the member to support the measures that we will be bringing forward. We will bring forward a budget at an appropriate time and it will be an appropriate response to the situation in Ontario's economy today.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: This province is bleeding jobs at a rate of 66,000 a month, and yet this minister is prepared to stand in this House and go two months without an action plan in place. Last week, our leader wrote to the Premier suggesting that we set up three select committees during those 10 weeks to look at specific economic issues and consult. You haven't responded. Minister, we are dealing with an unprecedented crisis. Don't continue to sleepwalk through the crisis. Why are you not prepared to agree to those select committees and give them serious consideration?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I remind the member opposite that this government had to time-allocate a motion to force them to go out and consult with the committees that exist. I can assure the member that we will bring forward a budget at the appropriate time that builds on the stimulus package we have already introduced and she voted against. She and her party and her leader, wherever he is, voted against more money for infrastructure. She, her party and her leader voted against targeted tax cuts to put money in the hands of manufacturers. She, her party and her leader voted against money for research and innovation that will help Ontario through these tough times.

What we need now is a federal partner, regardless of which party forms the government or whether it's a coalition, that will treat Ontario fairly, unlike the Harper Conservative Tory government in Ottawa.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Acting Premier. General Motors Canada and Chrysler Canada have requested emergency loans from the Ontario and federal governments. They are asking for \$2.4 billion by January 1; in other words, one month from now. Without these emergency loans, they believe Ontario may lose as many as 400,000 jobs. That would make the current difficult recession even more painful.

My question is this: Now that the McGuinty government knows what these automakers are asking for, when will the McGuinty government put forward its plan?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Economic Development, Speaker.

Hon. Michael Bryant: The companies submitted their plans in response to the request from the federal and provincial governments that the companies provide for both governments information with respect to the sustainability of the industry and the financials of each of the companies.

The information that was released to the government is not the same as the information that was released to the public, and I think the industry has to make the case to the public as well as to the government. The information that was released on Friday was not quite as transparent as it could have been, in terms of the information that ought to go to the public. I'm encouraging the industry to provide some more information to the public. If they don't, then, working with them, I will do it for them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The question was, where is the McGuinty government's plan? A week ago, the McGuinty government was saying it wanted to wait on Washington. Well, the US Congress have indicated what they're prepared to do, and they have indicated some of the things that they're prepared to put in place.

We see the situation getting worse virtually every day, we see the massive job loss that is happening already, so the question becomes, once again: When is the McGuinty government going to stop saying, "Well, we have to wait for Washington, we have to wait for Ottawa"? When is the McGuinty government going to take action and present its plan?

Hon. Michael Bryant: It's interesting: The leader of the third party was against our providing assistance to the auto industry, was against the entire auto strategy, whereby assistance was provided to the auto industry. Now the argument is that, in fact, we should be providing assistance to the auto industry. Those were significant investments made in the past that led to significant investments by the industry, and jobs. We now have a situation where we have to assess the financials and the sustainability of the industry. We also have to keep in

mind what's going on in the United States. The member would be incorrect to say that the United States Congress has indicated what it's going to do. They have not indicated what they're going to do. They are looking at what they are going to do, and there is no consensus as to how they're going to act.

Obviously, Canada has to ensure that when the United States acts, Canada is in a position to make a decision so that we can act in the public interest. We're very confident that we're going to be in that position.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I think the McGuinty government should know that the auto sector is very important to Ontario's economy, it is vital to southern Ontario's economy, yet I hear the McGuinty government once again referring to, "Well, we have to wait on Washington, we have to wait on Ottawa."

I can read the papers. This is what the US Congress is considering: an oversight board to ensure that companies are held accountable for the public's multi-billion-dollar investment; equity stakes; limits on executive pay; a ban on dividends; and an approval process for large business transactions. These are the kinds of conditions New Democrats have been advocating for over a year now, something the McGuinty government has failed to do.

I ask again: What you've done so far—simply throwing money with no job guarantees, no product guarantees—hasn't worked, so when is the McGuinty government going to present its plan?

1050

Hon. Michael Bryant: That's quite a "New" Democratic Party, a party that suddenly embraces investments in auto and sounds a lot more like Hank Paulson and Bob Rubin than Howard Hampton.

What is taking place in the United States is to consider the bridge loan and then consider the longer-term loan once the President-elect takes office. In Canada, the options are either to provide financing—or not—with respect to the industry directly to the Canadian subsidiaries, or to participate with the United States government with respect to the bridge loan that's provided. Those are the choices. We're obviously working closely with the federal government, and the federal government and the embassy are working with the United States government. We're going to make sure that tax dollars, if they are spent, are spent wisely. We have to make decisions about the sustainability and financials of this industry, and that's exactly what we're doing.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Acting Premier: It's very interesting that, once again, the McGuinty government talks a lot, but as jobs are disappearing, the McGuinty government is nowhere to be seen. And it's not just the auto sector. Friday's Stats Canada report showed 71,000 jobs lost across Canada, 66,000 of them in Ontario; in other words, hardly any job loss elsewhere in

the country, but in Ontario, a disaster. Economists are warning that unless the McGuinty government takes dramatic action right away, things may spiral even more out of control.

I ask again: I hear the McGuinty government speeches; when is the McGuinty government going to present a jobs plan for Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This government has great empathy and strong policies for any family that suffers loss of a job or loss of employment. I remind the member opposite that what is occurring in the world economy today, particularly in the US economy, does have a direct bearing on Ontario. Let me quote the governor of the Bank of Canada: “We are going to go through a period of slowdown, the U.S. is in recession and (there’s a) global recession....”

“He said governments should be investing now in measures to boost the Ontario and Canadian economies.”

He cited infrastructure—\$9.9 billion; the latest instalment, \$1.1 billion two weeks ago. That member and his party voted against it. The governor of the Bank of Canada talked about investing in innovation, and we are doing that. That member and his party voted—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again, it’s so interesting to listen to the McGuinty government’s line. They refer to, “Well, you know, there’s trouble in Europe and there’s trouble in the United States.” Did British Columbia lose 66,000 jobs last month? Did Quebec lose 66,000 jobs last month? Did Manitoba lose 66,000 jobs last month? No. The job loss was all in Ontario. Why? Because you have a McGuinty government that talks a good line on the forest sector, they talk a good line on the auto sector, they talk the same old line about infrastructure, but they’ve done next to nothing to present Ontario with a jobs strategy. We are in a crisis. This is getting worse every day. Same old, same old from the McGuinty government isn’t working. When are we going to see a jobs plan from the McGuinty government: after we lose another 100,000 jobs?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Every province in Canada will feel what Ontario is feeling now. I think that average Ontarians understand what’s going on. They see the news. They understand that, as a manufacturing jurisdiction that exports to the United States, the situation in the US economy is absolutely impacting us very directly in a way that it’s not yet impacting other provinces.

We laid out a plan. Today there are thousands of people working on infrastructure projects that we put in as part of our fall statement last year—part of our budget. That member voted against it. There is no easy way out of these challenging times. It’s not sufficient for anybody in this House to simply say, “We can fix it.” The five-point plan we laid out is the right plan; it’s creating jobs. We will continue to build on that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government continues to talk about the same old, same old. You talk about your five-point plan as 60,000 jobs a month are literally disappearing. Hello? Most people would say, “There’s something wrong here,” but the McGuinty government continues to talk as if everything is operating tickety-boo.

Let me give you examples of some of the things that are being considered in the United States. In addition to aid to the auto sector, a real activist government would speed up infrastructure projects, not the same old, same old; it would actually be investing more in infrastructure. A real activist government would implement a large-scale energy retrofit program through the public sector. Do we see that in Ontario under the McGuinty government? No. A real activist government would put money in the hands of the lowest-income people and raise the minimum wage to \$10.25 an hour today. When are we going to see a jobs strategy from the McGuinty government other than referring to somewhere else when—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Let me respond point by point. In terms of the auto sector, between the AMIS fund and the Next Generation of Jobs Fund, we’ve leveraged \$7-billion investment in the auto sector. That member and his party voted against it.

In terms of infrastructure, Ontario has an unprecedented amount of infrastructure going on right now. Most recently, two weeks ago, we gave our municipal partners \$1.1 billion for projects that are ready to go today. That member and his party voted against it.

In terms of energy retrofits, a year and a half ago, we introduced a program that is helping families do that today. That member and his party voted against it.

In terms of assistance to the lowest-income, this government has raised welfare rates. It has raised the minimum wage time and again over the last four years. We have a plan. It’s the right plan for the times. We have more to do, and we will continue to build on that success. We only hope that his votes—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

LITERACY AND BASIC SKILLS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, you’re aware that the 112 community literacy agencies in Ontario have not received increases in base funding since your government came to office. They also have not received any of the \$311 million your ministry has received this past April from the federal government under the labour market agreement.

The volunteers in these agencies volunteer 220,000 hours each year, helping our most vulnerable citizens learn basic reading and writing skills; for example, how to write a resumé. With tens of thousands of Ontarians losing their jobs, the number of people requiring basic

reading and writing skills is rising at a rapid rate. Minister, what is your plan to inject resources into the 112 literacy and basic skills agencies in our province?

Hon. John Milloy: I would like to acknowledge the network of literacy providers throughout the province. This year alone, our government has spent \$75 million in terms of literacy programs, which are offered by a variety of providers. The honourable member is correct that there has been federal money that has come to help job supports, and we've always acknowledged that. In the March budget, we outlined a \$2-billion skills-to-jobs action plan, which contained with it a number of programs and enhancements to services that allow people to access this important literacy work.

In terms of these literacy providers, I've had the pleasure of meeting with many of them, and my ministry will continue to meet with them as we develop further services for those who need this important service.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Minister, it's amazing that volunteers contribute 220,000 hours of work each year towards basic literacy. It's at least a value of \$4 million, and at the same time, you're wasting \$4 million to advertise the new Second Career program. Can you explain to the folks administering the literacy and basic skills programs across our province why you have neglected the important work they do at this critical period, while at the same time giving millions of dollars to ad agencies to advertise the Second Career program, a program that is clearly failing at this point?

Hon. John Milloy: I'm very pleased, if the honourable member wants to talk about the Second Career program, to report to this House that, as of last Friday, we have about 2,300 people who have come forward for Second Career. Second Career, as the honourable member knows, is 20,000 people over three years, and we recently made adjustments to allow more people to come forward. We're anticipating a greater increase, especially as we head to January and people come forward with plans to go forward to a community college or private career college.

In terms of literacy, we recognize literacy as an important part of Employment Ontario's range of services. We invest \$75 million a year in the program, and we continue to work with providers to make sure that they have the resources they need to move forward. We will be consulting with them over the coming months as we prepare next year's plan.

1100

POVERTY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Last week, the government launched its so-called poverty reduction strategy. The Ontario Coalition for Social Justice is correct to point out the many holes in this scheme, not the least of which is a living minimum wage. Why won't this government lift thousands of minimum-wage earners out of poverty by

raising Ontario's minimum wage to \$10.25 an hour immediately?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: You're quite right. Last week we did release the poverty reduction strategy. I do want to take this opportunity to talk a little bit about it. It's about breaking the cycle of poverty. We're focusing on kids first because that's the right place to start.

This is a strategy that has received endorsements from a wide range of people. Let me start with Pat Capponi from Voices from the Street. She says, "Today, Ontario is turning a corner on poverty. We are closing a chapter on the days where government believed it could make political gains on the backs of the poor. This is the kind of foundation on which we can build real progress against poverty and achieve a better society for all Ontarians."

Michael Mendelson from the Caledon Institute of Social Policy says, "This is truly a historic day for this province. For the first time in Canadian history, a government is setting a target to reduce poverty based on a"—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The vast majority of the money in this plan is contingent on federal financial support in a robust economy. We need a real provincial anti-poverty reduction strategy that includes a \$10.25 minimum wage now, the creation of 7,000 affordable housing units every year, a full child benefit of \$1,100 per month now, an increased shelter component to reflect real rental costs and a child care plan that will get 23,000 children off the waiting list now.

Why won't this government provide Ontario's poor with a provincial plan, one that doesn't rely on other levels of government to attack poverty right here?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We make no apologies for inviting the federal government to the table on this. Ontario's poor children are Canada's poor children.

Let me tell you what Frances Lankin, president and CEO United Way Toronto and former member of the Legislature, said today: "I'm prepared to say congratulations and thank you to the Premier and the cabinet committee and their commitment. Many others would have walked away given the difficult times we're in. This government didn't and they deserve credit."

Rabbi Arthur Bielfeld from the June Callwood Campaign against Child Poverty says, "With this announcement Ontario is turning the corner on poverty. In these challenging times, the Premier has affirmed that we are all in this together. That we will overcome the challenges ahead and do all that we can to ensure that no child will be left behind. We applaud the plan ... June Callwood must be smiling today."

ROAD SAFETY

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. On November 18, the McGuinty government introduced legislation that, if passed, will protect Ontario's families by making Ontario's roads even safer. Included in this proposed legislation is extending the

graduated licensing program from two years to three years, introducing zero blood-alcohol concentration for all drivers aged 21 and under and bringing the fines and penalties for more serious Highway Traffic Act offences in line with other jurisdictions. Road safety is important to every resident of Ontario, and that is why I support all the proposals as listed.

However, one proposed initiative has raised many concerns, and that is the proposed extension on passenger restrictions for those in the G2 stage. I would like to ask the minister if that is a concern he has been hearing as well, and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. James J. Bradley: That is an excellent question. Our roads are always declared to be the safest in North America. There's much more we have to do, however, and that's why we introduced the legislation that, if passed, will help make them even safer. As the member stated, we propose to extend the G-licensing system to three years, so young and novice drivers have a greater opportunity to acquire the safe driving skills that serve them throughout a lifetime.

Our proposed legislation was to extend the current passenger restriction that exists now to all day for teen-aged drivers, and, as the member has pointed out, there have been concerns raised by members of this House, members of the government caucus, members reflecting what they're hearing in their communities and particularly members who are from rural and northern areas of the province. I invited this kind of dialogue to take place and these concerns to be expressed, and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I have received a number of letters, e-mails and phone calls on this particular issue, and I'm not the only MPP who has been receiving that type of feedback. There are those who support passenger restrictions, but there are many who have raised concerns about the proposed change, citing a variety of reasons.

I have heard from the youth in my riding who are very concerned about how this proposed legislation will affect their ability to carpool to school, sporting events and social gatherings.

I am asking the Minister of Transportation to please share with this House what he has been hearing from Ontarians and the next steps on dealing with concerns that have been raised.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I can assure the member that there has been some very significant support for the bill as a whole. People seem to like—and the opposition members and my own government members have said this—a zero blood-alcohol provision, extending graduated licensing to three years, and getting tougher on suspended drivers; in other words, a number of very comprehensive parts of it that they think are very useful.

I can say, however, that if there's one area of the bill where there has been concern expressed by virtually all members of the House, particularly those of the northern

areas and the rural areas, it is the area of extending the restriction to more than the time between 12 and 5 and more than one person. I do want to assure the member that we have listened to those representations and that in fact that provision will be withdrawn from the bill.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Order.

The member from Thornhill.

UNIVERSITY LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Deputy Premier. Deputy Premier, my constant questions in this House about the York University strike address my wish for a speedy resolution. The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities has said that I have no exclusivity on concern for the academic year of 50,000 students. He has further stated that universities are autonomous and that York and CUPE 3903 should sit down and work things out. Apparently, that is easier said than done. I'm speaking because I have a voice and others do not. Leaving this situation unresolved in our last week here means no legislated end to this strike before at least late February. Mediation efforts have not been successful. I believe the Minister of Labour has to address this right now, don't you?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: Again, I can only reiterate that all members in this Legislature are concerned about the situation at York University and the fact that students aren't able to return to the classroom. We call on both sides to come back to the table and reach an agreement as quickly as possible.

The member is right: Universities are autonomous institutions. They're governed by rules surrounded by collective bargaining. The province, through the Ministry of Labour, has a mediator on-site who is working with both sides, and we continue to urge them to sit down for the best interests of the students at York.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Obviously, this minister and I are on the same page: We're all concerned. But we're talking about doing something here. I'm being insistent and vocal because someone has to speak out on the York situation.

Thornhill, my riding, is home to many York students and staff, now in their fifth week without classes, without any chance of settlement or resumption of school, and Christmas break is around the corner.

I am asking the minister to stand in his place today and tell this House, the student body of York University and the people of Ontario that back-to-work legislation will be presented and passed this week in this Legislature.

Hon. John Milloy: Again, everyone in this Legislature is concerned about the situation at York, and we continue to call on both sides to resume talks as soon as

possible through the Ministry of Labour. We have a mediator who is helping those negotiations. We want to see an agreement passed as quickly as possible that's in the best interests of the students.

At the same time, we recognize the autonomy of York University and the collective bargaining system which governs their negotiations.

We encourage both sides to come to the table as quickly as possible so that we can allow students to get back to class.

1110

NUCLEAR SAFETY

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Yesterday, Canadian Press reported on a Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission document indicating that research on the safety of storing radioactive waste in limestone near Kincardine, which is the McGuinty government's only nuclear waste plan, is full of holes.

My question is this: Why is the McGuinty government launching a nuclear mega-scheme when the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission says that you don't even know where to put the radioactive waste from your existing nuclear power plants?

Hon. George Smitherman: I appreciate the honourable member's question. Indeed, the CNSC and others are an important part of the mix with respect to the provision of nuclear power in any jurisdiction. The matter at hand that the honourable member raises is, of course, one of the particular challenges associated with the utilization of that form of fuel for the purpose of electrical generation. I think it's important that on this matter we continue to work diligently on a solution that for the very long term can be a successful one.

As an interim step, we have completed substantial investment of storage capacity at the Darlington site, which holds us in very, very good regard for the moment. We'll continue to work diligently towards the long-term solution that's much desired.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Well, this is bizarre. The McGuinty government says that everything is fine and dandy with nuclear power, yet Canada's independent nuclear safety commission says that the McGuinty government's plan for nuclear waste storage is totally untested, unproven, and full of holes.

David Suzuki, who this government used to like to cite, says that building or refurbishing nuclear plants in Ontario, which is the McGuinty government's plan, is simply not necessary; that we can meet our needs through renewable power, energy conservation, and energy efficiency.

My question is this: Rather than put future generations at risk, why won't the McGuinty government at least put a moratorium on building or refurbishing nuclear plants until it has a safe plan for storage?

Hon. George Smitherman: I don't think it's right that the honourable member should leave the impression

that our government is not still citing Dr. David Suzuki, for just in my presence last week—and in front of hundreds, including at least a researcher from the NDP caucus—David Suzuki said that the Dalton McGuinty Liberal government has been great for the environment.

We're still quoting Dr. Suzuki, and we appreciate very much his strong encouragement that here in Ontario we take a faster, more vigorous and aggressive approach with respect to the bringing to life of renewable energy in the province. On that point as well, we abide the good advice that he has to offer.

As I said in my earlier answer, the matter at hand that the honourable member raises is a serious one. It requires serious attention and serious work, and that's what it's getting. I think that over time, the honourable member will see that this is a balanced approach to energy supply in the province of Ontario.

POVERTY

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question today is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. The first poverty reduction round table was held in my riding of Peterborough. My community, especially the Mayor's Action Committee on Poverty Reduction, is on the leading end of the fight against poverty in Ontario. We had community leaders, advocates and people living in poverty attend the round table to provide their advice for a provincial strategy. They spoke of challenges we face, but also of the power of communities and the innovative solutions they develop. The poverty reduction strategy, which was released last week, called for everyone to be part of the solution and for everyone to do their part. Can the minister please outline how the strategy recognizes a vital role of communities and the impact they can make?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Peterborough is one of the communities that's taking a real leadership role, and I thank the member for ensuring that they were able to contribute to our strategy.

We heard loud and clear, and saw first-hand, that communities have the capacity to respond to local issues with innovative solutions. Just as we know that strong kids need good schools and strong parents, strong parents and families need the support of engaged, dynamic and thriving communities to be their best. That's why we'll invest \$5 million annually in the communities opportunity fund to encourage neighbourhood revitalization through partnerships between local business, governments, volunteers, community agencies, and, most importantly, local residents.

We also heard that the location of services in the community is key. That's why we'll invest \$7 million annually in the development of a community hub program. The program will focus on using schools as hubs that respond to community needs related to poverty reduction and student achievement.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'm glad to hear that the government has recognized the power of communities and is acting to

support them in making an important contribution to the fight against poverty.

While there are many things that communities such as my own are doing to help people achieve their full potential, there is also a need for action on the provincial level. Child care is one such example. I am aware that our government has made investments to improve access to affordable child care and there's more to do. Especially for single parents, child care can be crucial to getting or keeping a job. Could the minister explain this morning what the government is doing to improve access to vital child care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member is absolutely right: Child care is important. That's why, in our first mandate, we created 22,000 new licensed child care spaces and over 20,000 additional child care subsidies. This year we're investing another \$23 million—all provincial money—to provide 3,000 more subsidies to families who need help with the cost of child care.

Our next step is the implementation of full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds. Extensive research shows that kids in high-quality full-day learning programs do better in school and that excellent early learning programs reduce inequalities among children. Full-day learning will also free up child care spaces for thousands of families. In order to implement full-day learning in the best way possible, the Premier appointed Dr. Charles Pascal as Ontario's early learning adviser. His report is expected in the spring.

Part of the first phase of implementation will be focused on low-income neighbourhoods, because we need these kids to be their—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Health. There's a story in the *Globe and Mail* today regarding Greg Troy, who has a rare disease called Pompe. Although there is now a drug to treat this often fatal disease, your ministry has rejected his application, which was submitted by his doctor, the lead neurologist at London University Hospital. Just as Dr. Venance asked for coverage of this drug on compassionate grounds, on behalf of Greg, who is watching today, I am asking you to do so.

Hon. David Caplan: Certainly, I know that Ontarians and their family members with rare diseases face enormous challenges.

As the member is well aware and as the story in the *Globe and Mail* highlights, Canada is one of the few nations which does not have a national program for drugs for rare diseases. In fact, it has been health ministers from across the country who have gathered together to press the national government for such a program. In the absence of that, Ontario has moved on its own to formulate a strategy and a method by which individuals requesting these life-saving medications can have some evaluation and possibility of approval.

We are committed to improving access to therapies that are proven medically beneficial; namely, that have clear clinical outcomes to support the findings. We are working toward that on a case-by-case basis. These are determined not by, as the member well knows—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Despite the commitment to move forward more quickly and give approval in funding, unfortunately, it hasn't happened since the announcement in 2006.

In the *Globe and Mail* today, your Ministry of Health spokesperson says it's going to take months to determine if funding for this rare disease will be approved. Minister, I have seen Greg. He wasn't able to meet with me. He wasn't able to get out of his car; I had to go and talk to him in his car. He doesn't have months to live without this drug. His condition is deteriorating and he struggles to take each breath each day.

Will you commit today, on compassionate grounds, to provide bridge funding for this drug until a national orphan drug policy is put in place?

Hon. David Caplan: I have been pressing, certainly, the previous national Minister of Health to move forward on a national program for rare diseases and I have written to Minister Aglukkaq and urged her to do the same.

The member well knows that we are working on a new approach where each case is evaluated on an individual basis. The committee to evaluate drugs and the executive officer recognize the challenges of producing clinical evidence and favourable cost-effectiveness data for drugs for rare diseases. It's simply that there are not enough trials or enough cases to be able to meet the unusual standard and thresholds. That is why we have moved to put in place a framework and a decision-making and evaluative ability which is unique to Ontario. We are working in concert with other provinces. I know the Atlantic provinces have asked to join with us in a similar kind of framework. Our hearts go out to all—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The member from Nickel Belt.

1120

INFECTIOUS DISEASE CONTROL

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Last week, I asked the minister about the strep A outbreak in Thunder Bay. The minister responded, and I quote, "The strep A outbreak is confined to a particular population and has not spread." Daniel MacMaster, a talented Ontario musician, a healthy man in his 30s, a husband and a father of two children, contracted strep A in Thunder Bay and tragically passed away from the infection. Mr. MacMaster could not have been considered as part of the particular population or as an at-risk individual.

Ontario needs guidelines and standards to guide medical officers of health in making decisions concerning communications to the public. Why won't the minister do it?

Hon. David Caplan: I cannot speak to the individual case, but I certainly want to express my condolences to all who have been impacted certainly by strep A but by any infectious disease outbreak. The risk of spread of infectious disease and the like does call upon us all as leaders within our health care system for a heightened level of vigilance.

I've been assured that local health officials have been communicating throughout the investigation with the medical community and with outreach workers for the at-risk groups. I expect that our medical officers of health will determine when it is appropriate to issue public notices about outbreaks and continue to provide clarity around public notifications.

I know that Ontario's chief medical officer of health has had the chance to connect with the member opposite, has in fact chatted with the member and answered her questions related to the protocols between medical officers of health, public health units and when the public is notified. I'm satisfied that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Mr. MacMaster did not know about the outbreak. The 1,500 people who participated in Operation Trillium Response who came to Thunder Bay did not know about the outbreak. There is a risk to public health. Public health needs to be taken seriously, and that includes clear communication guidelines and standards to guide medical officers of health in making decisions to inform the general public about outbreaks. Why won't the government commit to doing this today?

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, there are very clear guidelines for medical officers of health in relation to communication with public health units. The member knows this full well.

In fact, in the case of Thunder Bay and the public health unit, they did request the ministry and they advised the health unit to alert physicians in the area of the increased invasive group A streptococcal bacterial outbreak cases to encourage early identification and treatment and to advise physicians on the current guidelines for management.

The ministry also responded by facilitating deployment of two federal field epidemiologists to the Thunder Bay District Health Unit in early June to assist with their investigation. It is up to the local medical officer of health to determine when it is appropriate to notify the public, and I can tell you that I believe they have taken the appropriate actions to have containment—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. With the current economic conditions, tenants in my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore are telling me that they are concerned about being able to afford their rent. With the rising cost of

living and uncertain futures, they want to know that they'll be protected, as do many other tenants across the city of Toronto. In the past, the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal was known by many as an eviction machine that had no concern for tenants. How are we going to help tenants in my riding guard against rising rents and potential evictions in the challenging times that lie ahead?

Hon. Jim Watson: I want to thank the honourable member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore for the good work she does in representing tenants in her community. The Residential Tenancies Act, which has been in effect for over a year now, brings more balance back to the relationship between tenants and landlords. I'm pleased to report that there's no longer a backlog of cases. That's been cleaned up, and every tenant facing an eviction is now afforded the benefit of a hearing. At the same time, landlords can fast-track problem tenants because they are disrupting the enjoyment of the rest of the tenants. Tenants in buildings with serious maintenance problems may apply for a freeze on rent increases. Landlords are not allowed to charge a rent increase until a serious maintenance problem is fixed and municipalities have now been given the power to license landlords. We're proud of the Residential Tenancies Act, the work that it has done, and we look forward to working with tenants' groups across the province to ensure that their rights are protected.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: While these changes will no doubt be of benefit to tenants in my riding, the reality is that most tenants and landlords don't go to the Landlord and Tenant Board. Most tenants pay their rent and most landlords care for their properties.

My concern, Minister, is that rent continues to go up. I talk to young families and students who live on tight budgets, and they rely on predictable expenses year over year. With the price of gas and home heating fuels on the rise, many tenants are paying special attention to their bottom line.

The NDP wants to cap rent for two years to ensure that rent remains affordable. I want to know what the RTA does to ensure rent remains affordable and whether such a rent cap is the best way to ensure that we continue to have affordable rental accommodations in the city of Toronto and the province.

Hon. Jim Watson: A rent cap, in fact, would have a negative impact on the supply of rental properties in the province and the NDP plan would move landlord-and-tenant relations back to a divisive area that we don't want to repeat.

We have a more balanced approach, working with both tenants and landlords, and the annual rent increase is now tied to the Ontario consumer price index. The 2009 guideline, for instance, is set at 1.8%. It protects tenants from rent increases above the rate of inflation, while allowing landlords to recover increasing costs.

Let's just take a moment at the rent increases of the three parties who have had the honour of forming government in this province. Rent increases under our government have averaged 2.05%, under the

Conservatives they've averaged 2.9%, and under the NDP the average was 4.82%. So we will continue a balanced, practical approach to landlord-tenant relations and we certainly do not take any lessons from the NDP—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

MINISTRY SPENDING

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: To the Minister of Government Services. He's had a few days now to collect himself and review his ministry's public accounts for 2008. May I ask again: Why did his hotel and conference budget increase by 78% during a recession and, as importantly, how could he as minister lose track of his ministry's runaway spending, particularly during this tough economic recession?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: For the record, I just want to say to the honourable member that there has never been a day I stayed at the Royal York Hotel with either Queen Elizabeth or former President Bill Clinton, as she alleged the other day.

The other thing I want to say is that we support the Ontario public service, particularly the Ontario public service's need for training and professional development with respect to successful service benchmarks. We had two events at the aforementioned hotel. Both were training events. We sought quotes from other venues, and that was the most competitive venue.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The minister admitted in the House last week that he was in the dark about his hotel and conference budget and how it ballooned during a recession. There are only two conclusions that we can, on this side, draw from this. He either doesn't care or he's not able to lead his own department. The public accounts are clear. The minister authorized half a million dollars in hotel and conference spending, up 78% from last year, even though there are lots of conference and meeting spaces in this facility alone. How could the minister not know that? Spending the money is one thing; not knowing about it and not keeping track of it is another. This is embarrassing.

Will this minister tell this House how he could lose track of his skyrocketing hotel budget when everyday Ontarians are tightening their belts?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I just want to say for the record that I'm never in the dark when it comes to my hotel accommodations. That's first and foremost. I want to also say that aside from being mischievous, I could stand in my place and talk about the training events that we've never questioned that were incurred when the member from Leeds-Grenville was with the former Ministry of Public Safety and Security. I could talk about the \$159,000 spent at the Delta Hotels or the \$261,000 spent on staff training at the Holiday Inn, but I wouldn't want to do that. Instead, I'd much rather talk about how our government works very, very hard to ensure that our procurement is handled in a responsible and fair way and always in the best interests of Ontarians.

1130

FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Labour. The widow and son of Ontario firefighter Gene Morand would like to know—in fact, firefighters across Ontario would like to know—how is it that a man who spends 40 years fighting fires for the Tecumseh Fire Department and succumbs to a fatal occupational disease is not covered by WSIB when this government promised that all firefighters would be covered by presumptive legislation if they are killed by their jobs? When will this minister correct this injustice?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for the opportunity to say that our Premier and our government understand and recognize the hazards and the life-threatening work that firefighters go through. We have taken steps to ensure that firefighters and their families are treated with dignity and compassion. We've lifted the burden of proof from the backs of our hard-working firefighters and their families.

With the legislation or presumptive legislation, I can tell you that we've done a lot for our firefighters. We continue to work hand in hand with them. They protect our families. They go into our businesses, into our homes. When everybody is running out, they're running in to protect us.

We want to make sure that we address their safety concerns. We want to continue to work in lockstep with our firefighters. We've done so. We've brought forward presumptive legislation which is—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: I guess the minister is not familiar with the case. The minister's response is cold comfort to Mary Ellen and Larry Morand, who lost Gene to kidney cancer two years ago. Gene Morand fought fires in Tecumseh for 40 years straight. As a volunteer, he often fought all of them.

The McGuinty government promised all firefighters—full-time, part-time and volunteers—would be covered by presumptive legislation. We know that long-awaited regulation to make this happen is drafted, not on the board yet. What is the timetable for approving the legislation to ensure that Gene Morand and all volunteer and part-time firefighters in Ontario can be compensated for occupational diseases?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: First, I could speak for this entire House. We're all saddened by the passing away of the individual firefighter. We know that our firefighters do some very dangerous, high-risk work. As I said, our firefighters are out there on the front lines. They make sure that we are all protected—protecting our homes, protecting our businesses. They put their lives in danger's way and that's why our government has worked in partnership with our firefighters bringing forward presumptive legislation, understanding the dangers that they are under. We will continue to work with our firefighters. A regulation that we brought forward on compensation to full-time firefighters who suffer fire-related illnesses ad-

dresses many things: brain cancer, bladder cancer, kidney cancer, leukemia.

What I can assure the member—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Minister, I think all of us in this House would agree that the workplace is changing. Many different types of employment arrangements are now the norm and the rise in temporary help agencies testifies to that fact. In the past, employment through these agencies was mostly short-term, clerical jobs that lasted a few days or a few weeks. Today, agencies supply workers in a wide range of occupations and the employee of an agency might be assigned to a single client business for several months or even years. This has raised questions in my riding about whether temporary agency workers are being treated fairly compared to permanent or regular employees. I know this issue of fairness has been brought to the attention of your ministry. Would the minister tell us what he plans to do about the challenges faced by temporary workers in Ontario?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: First off, I'd like to thank the member for Brampton-Springdale for bringing forward this very important concern to all of us here in this House. Our government is committed to ensuring that employees working through temporary help agencies are properly protected under the law. Temporary employees and agencies that employ them are an important part of our workforce today in Ontario. Over 700,000 people in the province have temporary jobs, and it has been some time since the employment standards have been reviewed with a focus on temporary work. We believe that the time has come to review the legislation to determine whether it offers fair protections to and for our temporary employees. For that reason, I say to the member we've moved forward with the consultation on temporary help agency employment earlier this year. That was an extensive consultation. We've gotten a great deal of input and we are now reviewing that to look at our employment—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

ANNUAL REPORT, AUDITOR GENERAL

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table the 2008 annual report of the Auditor General.

The time for question period having expired, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1136 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Paul Miller: Last year, I attended the annual injured workers' rally outside the Ministry of Labour. I had

hoped it would be the last, that there would be significant progress on the four major issues of experience rating, cost-of-living adjustments, deeming, and 100% WSIB coverage in Ontario. The question I asked the Minister of Labour was, would he eliminate deeming and determining, eliminate experience rating, guarantee coverage for all workers, and provide full permanent cost of living for people receiving benefits? I also asked when the Liberal government would provide the support to help injured workers through their most difficult times and the appropriate assessment and retraining to help injured workers re-enter the workforce.

Sadly, last Thursday, injured workers had to hold yet another rally in the faint hope that this government would finally listen to their concerns and do something to get a start on these four major issues; not a study, not a temporary measure, but real, immediate action that will positively address these issues.

Particularly in these economic times, the Liberal government should do everything in its power to support Ontario workers who are injured on the job and face a bleak future because of the failings of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act.

I encourage the government to start with a senior-level shakeup at the WSIB and then begin a return to workers' compensation, not this failed and punitive insurance system.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I rise today to speak about a matter of importance to some of the residents in my riding of York South-Weston.

Late last week, I met with some residents of Weston village who have expressed concerns about a proposal for an air-rail link from Pearson airport to Union Station and expressed their hopes as to how this service can be delivered in the short term and long term.

If there's going to be an air-rail link through this community, residents would like public access to such service, with fares that are in keeping with current public transit options. In addition, residents would like the air-rail link to be below grade throughout Weston, to avoid closing streets such as Church, King, John, and Denison Avenue. Below grade would not only reduce the noise and vibrations of an air-rail link service, but also has the potential to do the same for GO trains and even Via Rail trains.

I am told by local residents that they would also like to see stops along the air-rail link route, including, for example, within the historical centre of Weston.

Finally, because we are now moving into the technology age of considering the transition from diesel to electric, every consideration should be made to make the train electric, as part of the initiatives of Metrolinx and GO Transit to look at electric conversion.

I continue to bring forward the concerns and ideas of residents as they relate to the air-rail link proposal.

I am proud to represent Weston in the Legislature and to work for the best transit for the people of York South-Weston and of Ontario.

HOCKEY

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Mr. Speaker, on November 19, I had the opportunity to attend an event with you to unveil Gary McLaughlin's new painting *Blue Sky-White Snow*. *Blue Sky-White Snow* is a painting to celebrate the 2007 80th anniversary of the Toronto Maple Leafs. This amazing painting is six feet by 12 feet and contains 763 individual portraits of past and present Maple Leafs, along with the Leafs' founder.

Since July 2006, Mr. McLaughlin has spent over 3,500 hours researching, drawing and painting all the players who had the opportunity to don the Maple Leafs' jersey. Each player had to be sketched and painted. The largest brush he used was a quarter of an inch in width.

Mr. McLaughlin's painting also showcases the evolution of the Toronto Maple Leafs. He has two large rectangle portraits: one of the original Leaf, Carl Voss; and one of Mats Sundin. These two large portraits inside the painting showcase the development of hockey equipment over the past 80 years, from 1927 to 2007.

Also, Mr. McLaughlin expands on the history of the Leafs by showing the different locations the Leafs have played in the past 80 years.

Blue Sky-White Snow is currently being showcased right here at Queen's Park. It is located on the fourth floor, at the entrance to the east visitors' gallery. If you have not seen the painting, I would recommend you take a look.

Currently Mr. McLaughlin is working on a similar painting for the 100th anniversary of the Montreal Canadiens. This painting will contain at least 850 faces to feature the same detail as *Blue Sky-White Snow*. Gary and his wife, Pat Crocker, are the owners of Riversong Gallery, located in my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound in the town of Neustadt.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The 2008 annual report of the Auditor General reveals, once again, that in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, you still pay more and you still get less. Since the McGuinty Liberals came to office more than five years ago, government spending has increased by more than \$22 billion. As the auditor tells us today, despite that hefty price tag, the government has nothing—absolutely nothing—to show for it. In fact, when it comes to protecting the health and safety of Ontarians, this government is backsliding.

Let's look at the facts: Safety inspection rates of commercial vehicles have dropped 34%, and only three out of every 1,000 trucks are being inspected; more than 100,000 criminal cases have been waiting more than eight months to be heard; and the government ignores warning signs when it comes to food safety inspections.

If there was ever a time that this government needed to wake up, it's now.

It's time to put the health and safety of Ontarians front and centre to make sure we're getting results for the money we spend, not simply writing cheques with no strings attached. I think that's shameful and, of course, the official opposition will be here each and every day throughout the rest of this session holding that government accountable, to make sure that every single dollar spent, that is taken in from taxpayers in this province, is spent wisely and they're held accountable.

ENERGY CONTRACTS

Mr. David Ramsay: I'm glad to stand in my place today to update people on the status of my private member's bill, Bill 131. This Thursday, we get second reading debate in the House and I look forward to that. I look forward to the participation of all the members of the House. Many people have shown support, and I look forward to that debate.

I will have it referred to one of our committees, and certainly, through more research and working with companies and the industry association, I see new ideas and ways—and I've talked to John Yakabuski, the energy critic for the official opposition—that we can work together and make this bill better. I look forward to having the opportunity where we could work together through the committee process and work with all parties making amendments to make this better and for the point of protecting our consumer.

I know many of the members in this House share the very sad and tragic stories that I've encountered in my riding, where the most vulnerable people have been taken advantage of by some very unscrupulous salespeople at the door, signing people up into energy contracts that are worth far, far more than they could purchase electricity or natural gas from their distributor. What we want is transparency. We want to clean this up once and for all. I think we can do that, and I look forward to working with all the members of the House in doing that in the next coming months.

TAXATION

Mrs. Christine Elliott: This government is leakier than a sieve. If it's not leaking billions in new spending each year, it's leaky and lax in ensuring results. Yet, despite this government's ever growing desire to spend more money, it's totally lax when it comes to collecting taxes from certain areas.

Take tobacco taxes: The government lets \$500 million go uncollected every year and the auditor confirms it. But it's not just tobacco taxes, it's other taxes and fines, as well—\$200 million worth to be exact, an increase from last year, including \$92.4 million in retail sales tax, \$59.8 million in corporate tax and \$7.3 million in Criminal Code fines, up an unbelievable 7,200% over last year.

But it's pretty simple. You reduce your spending, you make sure your taxes are smart, and you collect the taxes

you are supposed to collect. When it comes to fiscal management, this government gets an F.

EID AL-ADHA

Mr. Reza Moridi: Today is Eid al-Adha, a holiday celebrated by Muslims around the world. This morning, Minister Gerry Phillips and I had the privilege of joining thousands of Muslims for prayers at the CNE to celebrate this important day.

Eid, also known as the Festival of Sacrifice, commemorates the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son as an act of obedience to God. At the moment when Abraham was about to sacrifice his son, God intervened and provided a lamb instead.

1310

Eid al-Adha presents an opportunity to bring families, friends and the less fortunate together as they share food and gifts in celebration. Muslims are urged to distribute the qurbani meat equally amongst themselves, their friends and the poor. I would encourage the Muslim community throughout the province of Ontario to help the poor by dropping off food for charitable agencies.

On the occasion of Eid al-Adha, I would like to wish all Muslims of Ontario a very happy Eid and Eid Mubarak.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Ms. Laurie Scott: If memory serves me correctly, today is the third anniversary of the motion passed by this Legislature calling on the Dalton McGuinty Liberals to produce a comprehensive jobs plan to deal with the looming crisis in the manufacturing sector in Ontario. Well, it was looming at that time, three years ago; now we're in the thick of it. For three years, the McGuinty Liberals have failed to act on that motion, despite the fact that members sitting on this side of the House voted in favour of it.

At that time, McGuinty claimed it was a bit of a contraction. He claimed it would pass. He bobbled and weaved and ducked and dithered and delayed and denied, and then he announced that the government is going to put all its eggs in the retraining basket.

But today we learned, when we opened the 2008 Auditor General's report, the retraining programs and the apprenticeship programs the government spent so much on are failing: no strategy to increase enrolment in high-demand skilled trades, the Auditor General says; 50% of the people who enrol in the government's retraining programs drop out; of those who complete the program, the government has no idea if they stay in the field.

This is the old Dalton McGuinty approach: blow money out the door; no accountability. The people of Ontario are looking for a new approach, a new plan. We should have seen it three years ago, but today is the second-best time to deliver it. I hope we see that plan before Christmas.

DEMETRIOS DIPLAROS

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I rise today to join with all members of this House and all Ontarians in expressing my deep condolences to the Diplaros family. Private Demetrios Diplaros, a proud Canadian soldier serving with the first battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment, lost his life this past Friday in Afghanistan. He was only 24 years old and was serving our country as part of the Operational Mentor and Liaison Team embedded within the Afghan National Army.

I am told that Private Diplaros wanted to become a soldier from a very young age to be just like his father. He lived his dream and became that soldier. He was known for his smile. I hope his family—his father, Anargyros, his mother, Martha, and his brothers Nick and Peter—will remember that smile, and it will help them through their grief.

Today, Demetrios is coming home. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people will line the Highway of Heroes to pay their respect to Demetrios and his fellow officers, tragically killed. I know that bridge in Scarborough will be lined with Scarborough residents mourning the loss of a Canadian son, the son of one of our families. I want the Diplaros family to know that we will never forget their son's sacrifice and the sacrifice of his colleagues.

CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Jeff Leal: Today, Peterborough's Corporal Mark McLaren, aged 23, Toronto's Private Demetrios Diplaros, aged 25, and Keswick's Warrant Officer Robert John Wilson, aged 27, will return home, but it won't be for Christmas to visit their families and friends as they planned.

These three young soldiers' bodies will be driven along the Highway of Heroes today, after losing their lives in a roadside bombing attack in Afghanistan late last week. Representatives from my community will be making the trip down to the Highway of Heroes to join with thousands of mourners who will stand on the overpasses to pay their respects to these young soldiers, their families and their friends.

Corporal Mark McLaren was raised in the Peterborough area, and his family lives in Peterborough today. He was on his second tour of duty in Afghanistan, returning to active duty after being injured during the first tour. These three young men became the 98th, 99th and 100th Canadians to have made the supreme sacrifice while stationed in Afghanistan.

I'm always impressed by the commitment of these young men and women. They volunteer to serve as soldiers of the Canadian Forces knowing full well the dangers they will face, yet they take the roles without hesitation or personal regard. With so much attention being given to the current economic and political state of affairs, the death of these three young men is a sobering reminder of the challenges our soldiers face every day. Everyone needs to take some time to remember the

members of our Canadian Armed Forces, their families and friends, and to say thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask for unanimous consent so we could rise for a moment of silence for these three young soldiers who were killed last week.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

I ask all members and our guests to please rise as we observe a moment of silence for the three individuals who were killed in Afghanistan.

The House observed a moment's silence.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I rise with a petition to the House:

"Whereas the current Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital is fully utilized; and

"Whereas Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital was sized to serve a town of Oakville population of 130,000, and the current population is now 170,000"—and growing very rapidly;

"Whereas the population of Oakville continues to grow as mandated by 'Places to Grow,' an act of the Ontario Legislature"—passed by the Liberal government—"and is projected to be 187,500 in 2012, the completion date for a new facility in the original time frame; and

"Whereas residents of the town of Oakville are entitled to have access to the same quality of health care as all Ontarians; and

"Whereas hospital facilities in the surrounding area do not have capacity to absorb Oakville's overflow needs;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure the new Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital be completed under its original timelines without further delay."

I'm pleased to add my name to this petition and pass it to my page, Sara.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has launched a blatant attack on our province's grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren by cutting off access to the temporary care assistance program;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislature call on the minister to overturn her July 2008 directives outlining the temporary care assistance program and grant all grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren access to this much-needed financial support."

I agree with this petition and affix my name to it, and Sahara will deliver it.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition has been sent to me by Saveourchildren.ca, and it's addressed to the Parliament of Ontario and the Attorney General. It reads:

"Whereas the Canadian Judicial Council has been asked by Ontario's Attorney General to probe the judicial behaviour of judges;

"Whereas judges are human beings and have been known to make serious mistakes in the judicial system, leading to devastating consequences and unfair justice for Canadian citizens;

"Whereas some judges have been observed making biased, disrespectful comments and abusing their judicial powers;

"Whereas Canadian families need to be protected from these judges who are unable to change their habits, unable to follow the rule of proper conduct, unable to exercise recommendations set by the Court of Appeal, and consequently commit grave injustices;

"Therefore we, the undersigned citizens, are strongly requesting the following changes in our judicial system:

"(1) That a 'judicial demerit point system' be applied to ensure that judges are accountable for their judgments rendered;

"(2) That a yearly review of their performance be established."

I'm glad to sign this petition and I thank you for your attention.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. John O'Toole: It is my pleasure to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which reads as follows:

"Whereas the current Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital is fully utilized; and

"Whereas Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital was sized to serve a town of Oakville population of 130,000, and the current population is now 170,000; and

"Whereas the population of Oakville continues to grow as mandated by 'Places to Grow,' an act of the Ontario Legislature, and is projected to be 187,500 by 2012, the completion date for a new facility in the original time frame; and

"Whereas residents of the town of Oakville are entitled to the same quality of health care as all Ontarians; and

"Whereas hospital facilities in the surrounding area do not have capacity to absorb Oakville's overflow needs;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure the new Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital be completed under its original timelines without further delay."

I'm pleased to present this to Courtney, one of the pages, during her last week here before Christmas.

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TOM LONGBOAT

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition here from Jim Kirkland on Briar Hill Avenue in Toronto, whose father fought in World War I with Tom Longboat. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Tom Longboat, a proud son of the Onondaga Nation, was one of the most internationally celebrated athletes in Canadian history;

"Whereas Tom Longboat was voted" Canada's "athlete of the 20th century by Maclean's magazine for his record-breaking marathon and long-distance triumphs against the world's best;

"Whereas Tom Longboat fought for his country in World War I and was wounded twice during his tour of duty;

"Whereas Tom Longboat is a proud symbol of the outstanding achievements and contributions of Canada's aboriginal people;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario."

I support this petition, and I affix my name to it.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mrs. Julia Munro: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the 48 Sluse Road, Holland Landing, East Gwillimbury Sluse Road location is on the short list for the province's proposed northern York region peaking plant; and

"Whereas this proposed site is only 500 metres from Park Avenue Public School; and

"Whereas this proposed plant represents significant health and safety risks to the children and staff at Park Avenue Public School;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government to reject the proposed Sluse Road Holland Landing peaking plant project."

I've affixed my signature and have given this to page Jenna.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and it was sent to me by, among others, Purva Dave of Prestonwood Crescent in Mississauga. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I'm very pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Brittney to carry it for me.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with Bill 126, and it reads:

"Whereas the McGuinty government's Bill 126, Road Safety Act, 2008, unfairly targets and discriminates against teen drivers; and

"Whereas laws are already in place that punish drivers of all ages who speed and drink and drive; and

"Whereas this bill discourages carpooling and punishes teens who live in areas that don't have public transportation; and

"Whereas all citizens should be treated the same under the law;

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the provincial government revoke Bill 126 and enforce the laws that are already in place to deal with speeders and impaired drivers of all ages."

I support this petition.

TOM LONGBOAT

Mr. Dave Levac: This is a petition to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day. Tom Longboat was born in my riding on Six Nations territory.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Tom Longboat, a proud son of the Onondaga Nation, was one of the most internationally celebrated athletes in Canadian history;

"Whereas Tom Longboat was voted as the number one Canadian athlete of the 20th century by Maclean's magazine for his record-breaking marathon and long-distance triumphs against the world's best, and even raced horses;

"Whereas Tom Longboat fought for his country in World War I and was wounded twice during his tour of duty; and

"Whereas Tom Longboat is a proud symbol of the outstanding achievements and contributions of Canada's aboriginal people;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario."

I sign this petition with grief and for Bradyn to bring it to your attention.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition from the good people of Milton:

"Whereas the Milton District Hospital was designed to serve a population of 30,000 and the town of Milton is now home to more than 69,000 people and is still growing rapidly; and

"Whereas the town of Milton is the fastest-growing town in Canada and was forced into that rate of growth by an act of the Ontario Legislature called 'Places to Grow'; and

"Whereas the town of Milton is projected to have a population of 101,600 people in 2014, which is the earliest date an expansion could be completed; and

"Whereas the current Milton facility is too small to accommodate Milton's explosive growth and parts of the hospital prohibit the integration of new outpatient clinics and diagnostic technologies;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure the timely approval and construction of the expansion to Milton District Hospital."

I agree with the petition and affix my signature, and I pass it to my page, Sara M.

BATHURST HEIGHTS ADULT LEARNING CENTRE

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition has to do with English as a second language. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, the city of Toronto and the Toronto District School Board.

"Whereas there are over 2,000 adult ESL students being served by the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre, operated by the Toronto District School Board, in partnership with the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas this is the only English as a second language (ESL) learning centre in this area of the city located directly on the Spadina subway line, making it accessible for students across the city; and

"Whereas newcomers in Toronto, and in the Lawrence Heights area, need the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre so they can succeed in their career opportunities; and

"Whereas the proposed revitalization of Lawrence Heights threatens the existence of the centre;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that any revitalization of Lawrence Heights include a newcomer

centre and ensure that the Bathurst Heights centre continues to exist in the present location."

Since I agree with this petition, I'm delighted to support it.

GASOLINE PRICES

Ms. Laurie Scott: A petition for gas tax fairness to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the skyrocketing price of gasoline is causing hardship to families across Ontario; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government charges a gasoline tax of 14.7 cents per litre to drivers in all parts of Ontario; and

"Whereas gasoline tax revenues now go exclusively to big cities with transit systems, while roads and bridges crumble in other communities across Ontario; and

"Whereas residents of rural communities in Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock have been shut out of provincial gasoline tax revenues to which they have contributed; and

"Whereas whatever one-time money that has flowed to municipalities from the McGuinty Liberal government has been neither stable nor predictable and has been insufficient to meet our infrastructure needs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to redistribute provincial gasoline tax revenues fairly to all communities across the province."

LUPUS

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to present this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario on behalf of my seatmate, the hard-working member for Niagara Falls. It reads as follows:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no new safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

I'm pleased, on behalf of the member for Niagara Falls, to sign this petition, to send it down with my page from Mississauga-Streetsville, Jason Fernandes, and also

to welcome, in the members' gallery, his family: his mom and dad, Allan and Michelle, and his sister Stephanie.

1330

EMERGENCY DISPATCH SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with 911 emergency services in Parry Sound–Muskoka. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is considering relocating emergency ambulance and fire dispatch services currently provided by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service to the city of Barrie; and

“Whereas up to 40% of all calls received are from cellphones from people unfamiliar with the area; and

“Whereas Muskoka–Parry Sound residents have grave concerns about the effect on emergency response times if dispatch services are provided by dispatchers who are not familiar with the area; and

“Whereas 16 Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care-funded jobs, held by qualified communication officers from local communities, may be lost as a result of the relocation of dispatch services to the city of Barrie,

“Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the government of Ontario put the safety, health and economic concerns of the people of Parry Sound–Muskoka ahead of government efficiency interests and ensure that emergency dispatch services continue to be provided locally by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service.”

I support this petition.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The time for petitions has expired. Orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ROAD SAFETY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ ROUTIÈRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 4, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 126, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and to make consequential amendments to two amending acts / *Projet de loi 126, Loi modifiant le Code de la route et apportant des modifications corrélatives à deux lois modificatives.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? Further debate? There being—pretty close.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I just was anticipating with interest. I'm pleased to speak on Bill 126, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and to make consequential amendments to two amending acts. I was here during question period this morning when the minister rose in response to a backbencher's question and announced that he would not be proceeding with the multiple passengers in legislation. Obviously that is something that those of us in the

opposition have been raising for a number of weeks. We've received many e-mails. A good example that I raised was one where there was a university professor from Guelph who also happens to coach a rowing team. He makes mention of the fact that many of his participants in the rowing team of course have to get to the lake using vehicles, because there is no public transportation at that time of the day. He said this legislation would have serious repercussions for many of his athletes and others who participate in extracurricular activities, both at the high school and college and university levels—so we are obviously pleased that that is proceeding.

I think what Bill 126 has shown us more than anything else is the need for public consultation on this piece of legislation. There are so many young people who, while they have been, how shall we say, unimpressed with the legislative process to date, have finally seen something that makes them concerned, makes them write, makes them phone. It is a wonderful opportunity for the government and all legislators to allow them to participate in a very pro-active and specific manner if we open up the public hearings for Bill 126 to encourage that participation. It would be a shame if we finally have an opportunity where young people want to be engaged in the political process and see an opportunity to be engaged in the political process, and yet we ignore it and just proceed and say, “Well, we've looked after the one section with multiple passengers in the vehicle, so let's move on, and we don't need to talk about Bill 126 any further.” I think it would be a shame.

As one of the members in this chamber who happen to be on the younger end of the scale, I'm sure that I am not the only individual who has been trying to find ways to engage our young people in the political process, explaining to them how it's important, how they can actually make a difference in our political process. Bill 126 could be that opening, could be that opportunity to show young people and individuals who are interested in learning more about the political process that this is what happens: We debate; hopefully, we open up Bill 126 for public consultation and we allow some of the very helpful suggestions that have been coming forward.

The other aspect of Bill 126 that I have some concerns about is the age restriction as opposed to novice driver. There's no doubt that all of us are concerned about keeping our roads safe, ensuring that the people who have the ability and the desire to drive on Ontario roads do so in a safe manner. Our history in the Progressive Conservative caucus shows that we have been concerned about this and, as a government, we of course introduced graduated licences and have been supportive of many of those safety initiatives that have been brought forward from all levels and all parties in the House.

But when we specifically say if you are under 21, I think a better way to review and make an amendment to Bill 126 would be to reference it as a novice or new driver. Instead of highlighting what looks like, when reading it, age discrimination, we should talk about novice drivers. So if you have just acquired the skill of

driving a vehicle, whether you are 16 or 35, you are under those same kinds of restrictions that a novice driver would have. I would support an amendment to Bill 126 that would allow that.

There is much excellent legislation and many excellent reviews in effect right now with the licensing and the graduated licensing system. My challenge with Bill 126 as it is written is that we are painting all young people with the same brush: If you are under 21, if you are a new driver, then, ergo, you must be a poor driver; you must be an irresponsible driver. I, for one, would hope that that is not the intent of what the Minister of Transportation was trying to bring forward. If we could change the wording "under 21" and instead use the comment "novice," I think that would be a big improvement to the legislation as it is written.

The opportunity we are being given here with Bill 126 is to actually open up the process to allow young people the opportunity to participate in what is really the only part of the legislative process where they can get engaged and involved, and that is at the public hearings stage. I think it would be a grave injustice for us to ignore that opportunity.

I will be urging the House leader and the minister to move forward and have some very substantial public hearings on Bill 126.

I don't think it's any surprise when you represent a riding like Dufferin-Caledon, which is of course primarily rural in nature and has very little public transportation. We happen to only have one bus system in one community in the riding of Dufferin-Caledon, so the opportunity to use public transit that urban students and urban job seekers would have is not available in Dufferin-Caledon. The reality is, at age 18, if individuals so choose, they can get a job, they can go to post-secondary institutions, and if they happen to live in Dufferin-Caledon they are going to be doing that via their own wheels or via the benefits of individuals they carpool with.

1340

With that view in mind, looking at it from a rural or semi-rural community perspective, we have to really look at how Bill 126 is going to limit individuals' ability to participate either in post-secondary education or the very basic jobs and recreation aspect of it.

At that point, I guess—not to harp on the same issue—if we could call for and have very active public hearings, then that would be a good opportunity for us, as legislators, to move forward with 126.

On that note, I will close.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It's a pleasure to stand up and respond to the hard-working member from Dufferin-Caledon, who has spent many years working diligently in that riding.

She's absolutely right: This is a bill that talks about young drivers versus new drivers, and that discriminates against one sector of our population. Any legislation that

passes through the legislative body of Ontario should never, under any circumstances that I can think of, discriminate against one sector of our society. If there was an amendment that read that for the first three years of a driver's licence, drivers should have some restrictions placed on them, I would agree with that; but to designate that as a specific age bracket within our community is irresponsible, I think, on the part of this government.

It's also interesting that this important piece of legislation has a lot of consequences attached to it for the people of Ontario, yet as important as this is, there are no government speakers to this important piece of legislation. Is the government actually devoid of any comment on this piece of legislation?

They're changing it on the go. They're running down and changing it in question period, inappropriately, in my mind. That needs to be done during ministerial statements, not during question period. It certainly doesn't meet the purpose of the rules or the element of the rules, but it does meet the rules.

I wonder what the government's commitment to this bill is. I think, in the end, if the House were to prorogue this month, we might not see this bill again—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Beaches-East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to my colleague and what she had to say in terms of this bill. What she is asking for, I think, is really quite reasonable. She is asking that there be some really strong and prolonged hearings on the bill, so that people can come forward and comment on various aspects of the bill, and she remains troubled by a few of them. She has made a very good point in terms of new drivers versus young drivers and I think that we all need to look at that.

I understand—I was not here this morning—that the minister did rise in his place and talk about withdrawing the most egregious portion of the bill, which has probably assuaged a great many fears and shown young people across this entire province that getting your face on Facebook and passing your comments along, in a fashion which we have not seen to any great extent on bills, actually bore some fruit.

I would put to the government that the obligation, of course, rests with the government members and with the minister—whether or not they wish to proceed in a manner that would involve great public consultations. There are still things in this bill that the public would want to comment on, and I think the one that comes most readily to my mind is the whole question of the penalties that are involved and whether the penalties for young drivers will remain more severe than for those who have been driving for a long time. We now know that the young drivers will be able to put their friends in the vehicle, but at the same time, should they make a mistake on the road, the penalty to them will be much more severe than for drivers who have been on the road a long time. I think that's something that needs to be talked through in committee and I welcome the opportunity, should the government decide to send this to committee,

to hear from young drivers and new drivers as to exactly what they think.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I really want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to respond to the member from Dufferin—Caledon's comments. For a point of clarification, there is a commitment to go forward with hearings. We from this side of the House have demonstrated at every step our commitment to not only listening to the public, but acting upon that. That clearly was demonstrated today in the question to the Minister of Transportation.

From the riding of Huron—Bruce, I heard a number of concerns with regard to the graduated licence program. There were a number of concerns specifically for that portion, but I have heard strong support for the rest of the legislation. The minister has made it very clear that that has been removed. We know, going forward, that there will be hearings. We look forward to hearing from the public once again, but it really has given all of us the ability to focus in on the bulk of the legislation now, and taking that part out that there were so many concerns about.

I do want to thank the young people from my riding of Huron—Bruce. I heard from a number of them. It's not often that we do hear from our young people in the riding, but I can tell you that I think it's absolutely wonderful that they took the time to write letters, make calls and send e-mails. I certainly hope that they continue to be engaged in the politics that affect their day-to-day lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak to this very important bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I want to bring some information to light in the House, when you're talking about this bill. Certainly, the members know about the numbers in vehicles. However, I took a different perspective when I did some research on the bill. I called the breath technicians. Those are the individuals who do the Breathalyzer tests in the police forces. I asked exactly how this would impact or how it could be unfolded. I'm not sure the government has taken into consideration a number of factors that may be very significant. For example, if an individual who is under 21 takes Benylin—the number one component in Benylin is alcohol—they will then have a content of alcohol in their system at that time and be driving illegally; if they use something such as mouthwash or vanilla—the largest component of vanilla, 35%, is alcohol—it is not taken into consideration.

One of the other aspects that I don't know if the government has taken into consideration is those individuals who participate in the United Church and take the sacraments on Sunday. When they take their sip of wine, that will put them over on the Breathalyzer test and make them illegal for driving.

Currently, we have the law as 19 in the province of Ontario; however, the provision here takes zero toler-

ance, which should mean zero alcohol content. So for any individual, 21 and under, who has cough syrup of any kind—Benylin is the one that I checked the research on—it will have an impact. Individuals who have vanilla or mouthwash—I just talked to the breath technicians, the actual ones who do the enforcement on this, and you'll find there's a significant concern that has been brought forward that will make it very hard to enforce in the eyes of the courts, with the individuals doing the law. I would certainly hope that the government takes this into consideration when they're looking at finalizing the bill and how it's going to come out in its final form.

1350

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Dufferin—Caledon, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I appreciate the comments from my colleagues. I guess I would just reiterate that I would hate to see the Liberals not use this opportunity to have extensive public hearings on Bill 126. We've been given an opportunity with a piece of proposed legislation that actually is of critical interest to the youth of our province. If the Libs do not use the opportunity to hold extensive public hearings, then once again the youth will believe that their opinions are not valid, and they will become more jaded about the political process.

In fact, if I could put a word of warning to what happens if we don't continue to listen to the youth and talk to them about legislation that is proposed, it will come back to haunt the Liberals when we have our next election and then, once again, the youth of Ontario will get involved, but it might not be in the way that the current government would like.

So I urge extensive public hearings and hope that they are listening to all aspects of what is raised with Bill 126 and not just the passenger restriction.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I remember very, very well when I was a newly ordained minister and sent—the United Church can be like the army sometimes—to my first pastoral charge, which was Brucefield-Kippen, in Huron-Perth. Within the first year of being settled there, which is the term they use, we got the call at 3 in the morning, and it was from just outside my own charge. It was a car full of teenagers who had died drinking and driving in the wee hours coming back from a high school party.

I remember particularly the young minister whose unfortunate task it was to perform the burials for those young people. She was also in her first year of being settled out there. One of the salient details that really comes home to me as I remember that sad day and series of days and the numbers of families—there were five children involved, five families involved—was the fact that she and I had offered some of the same kids the opportunity to phone us. We said, "Don't hesitate, phone us. We'll come pick you up. We won't tell your parents. We'll drive you home. We just want to make sure that you get home alive." Obviously it didn't work. I know

that as I speak there are many communities, particularly rural communities, where driving is one of the only ways of getting around that will face this.

I certainly, as we all do in the New Democratic Party, support the bill in its current, amended form. We were not ready to vote on it prior to the announcement this morning.

I want to also send kudos out to the 141,000 young people who, in an incredible outpouring of democracy and exercise in democracy, actually decided to open a Facebook account and speak at the government and try to encourage and influence the government to do what was right. Kudos to them. Kudos to the 14,000 posts that went out around what the government eventually amended, which was this aspect of the bill condemning carrying of friends. It made no sense. Young people spoke out, and I'm so glad they did and that they had an influence. There's no question about it.

However, we in the New Democratic Party still have some issues with the way, for example, driver education is delivered in this province. I remember last year an Auditor General's report, then James McCarter, found that 55% of first-time drivers enrolled in the program had crashed their cars—about 62% more often. What this said is that if kids took most driver education programs, they became worse drivers than if they hadn't taken them. This is a pretty frightening statistic. Certainly the Auditor General didn't understand it, and his quote at the time was that they had done very little work—talking about the government—at all to see why this is happening. Our question to the ministry is—this is pretty significant—surely you should have investigated this and determined why this is happening so you can take appropriate action. We contrast that, for example, with the Manitoba government, which actually delivers driver education in schools for a mere \$50. You, as a high school student, get driver ed as part of your high school education. This, to New Democrats, makes sense, instead of the \$1,000 or more that it costs Ontario parents or Ontario young people to get driver education which, we hear, makes them worse drivers than if they hadn't taken it.

So there's obviously some work to do in driver education that won't be addressed by Bill 126, and it's something that should be addressed. I certainly applaud the member from Dufferin—Caledon, because I think that if we did have extensive committee work and hearings, the government would hear about this and the lack of adequate driver education in this province. That's something we certainly would call for.

Of course, we hear from this year's Auditor General's report that there are still problems with this government and its attempts at education. Certainly the government retraining programs, with their 50% dropout rate, are not working. Certainly the government's educational attempts where special-needs children are concerned—where the government has put in 54% more funding and only 5% more special-needs children are actually getting the services delivered to them—is a problem in training. Of course there are the other problems. Thank goodness

for the Auditor General, who pointed out that the Brampton hospital costs more with private funding than it would have—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Parkdale—High Park, take your seat, please. We're discussing Bill 126, which is amendments to the Highway Traffic Act.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I was segueing, based on the inadequacy of training and the inadequacy of government oversight of training.

To get back to the point on young drivers, we in the New Democratic Party plan on supporting the bill, but certainly would want to see that experiment in young democracy in this province, where you had 141,000 posting their objections to aspects of this act, get some recompense, and that would be in hearing those same voices speaking out at a committee as this bill is looked at. Certainly we would want to encourage young people to let their voices be heard and to speak up, because they can clearly see that when you do that, you do have an impact. You can influence public policy. This is grassroots campaigning at its best.

I hope the government does not squelch it. I hope they send this bill to committee. I hope they have extensive hearings. I hope they actually get to meet some of those 141,000 young people who managed to change the government's mind on this particular bill. I also hope—and I speak for all the New Democratic Party in this—that they look at the whole issue of driver education in this province and do something about it, because clearly it's absolutely inadequate as it stands.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I spent about a year and a half as PA to the Minister of Transportation, and I was always very proud of the fact that Ontario has the safest roads of any province or state in North America. One of the reasons we have that honour is that we're always looking for ways we can improve road safety. The excellent engineers—it's mainly engineers who look after safety; the roads are designed very, very safely, and they understand the whole concept of safety.

The issues that have been brought forward in this bill are all additional items that our government has been working on. The safeguards against street racing were very important; they were brought in by this government. There have been many, many other issues on that.

I am very pleased to see that we're still working in the same direction of making safer roads. It's so important, and the whole discussion with the young drivers on the first year of their G2 is going to be a good discussion, because I think there will be education issues that come out of that. That got home to those kids; it got home to the schools.

All these changes we're about to make are going to just make our roads safer, and that's what we're out there to do. We haven't got the opportunity of backtracking our government, our civil service, our engineers who design these roads and come up with these special designs

that do protect people. This is just part of it. This is just going to take us further down the road to make our roads safer, and we'll stay number one in North America, and that is what we want to do.

1400

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's always a pleasure. I think all members will agree on one thing. Certainly I know that our side, with Frank Klees as our critic, agrees with doing all that is necessary to make our roads safer.

Mr. McNeely and others who have spoken on this have finally taken action. Some of it is not exactly the right thing to do. In fact, one of the other bills—I'm surprised, first of all, that they didn't merge the two transportation bills; one is already before committee now. Then they latterly have introduced this other bill, Bill 126, which has two or three mistakes in it.

The public can tell the minister, Mr. Bradley, that they're not accepting of it. In fact, it's almost like it is a slam against young people. That is clear, from everything I've heard.

In fact, I could read a note here; I've got permission from most people to—this is from Russell Weeks. He was saying that the new driver against young people—yes, he admits that young drivers have a higher number of incidents, but restricting the number of passengers will hurt students and car pooling and indeed our environment. That's what I'm hearing universally.

Some of the initiatives in the bill are sound and well-intended. In fact, they were probably brought forward by Frank Klees at some point in time when he was Minister of Transportation, or Laurie Scott on the speed limiters, or myself on the whole idea of technology in the driver's space.

Doing the right thing, often—it's important that the minister is listening. If we're looking at not just the age 21 and the potential age discrimination part of it, we want to make the roads safer and we want to pass the bill, but he has to expunge a couple of references in the current drafting of the bill. I would say it was hastily drafted, poorly consulted on. In fact, he could have easily integrated it into the other Highway Traffic Act bill that is before committee.

We are listening closely to what concessions the government is prepared to make while at the same time keeping our roads the safest in the world.

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently again to the member from Parkdale-High Park, and she raised a very interesting point: that people who go to driver education schools actually have higher rates of accidents and higher rates of faults and demerits in the system than those who do not. That is very troubling, as she said. I'm not sure what the government should be doing; I know it's not contained within the body of this bill. But she makes a very good point.

The Auditor General made another very troubling point in his report: Those people who are driving instructors, who instruct young drivers on how to drive, are

more likely than average Ontarians to accumulate demerit points. He went on to say that about 360 instructors, 6.5% of them, collected demerit points for speeding, not wearing a seatbelt and disobeying a traffic light. I think that the government ought to be looking at this as well. When there is a potential to fault young people, for a bill of this nature to come forward—which has now, thankfully, been amended—to put a special onus on young people, then there should be that same onus to put some kind of safeguards around those who instruct.

I do remember, all the years ago when I was learning to drive, I went through the Toronto board of education. The Toronto Board of Education had a driver's education course. I am very thankful to this day for the course that they ran; the instructor who was provided, who met the board standards; and for that instructor's ability to impart to me and my colleagues in that class all of that which was necessary for us to become safe drivers. That kind of thing should be emulated across the province instead of the privatized scheme we have now, where driving instructors are oftentimes a very bad example to their students.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I appreciated the comments from the member from Parkdale-High Park. I too have had up-close-and-personal encounters with drinking and driving, and fatalities therefrom. In my past life, I was a funeral director and had, unfortunately, some of the same experiences she recounts.

I wanted to talk a little bit about driving schools, however, because that seems to be an issue, and seeing as we are providing a discount in the time that you need to get a licence if you do go to an accredited driving school, I think it is actually an issue. You would know that on September 1, 2007, the province of Ontario began regulating all driving schools. Compliance with provincial standards is now being monitored and strongly enforced. In the last year we have removed 30 schools that offered beginner driving education from our ministry-approved list because they weren't up to standard. We have audited all ministry-approved beginner driving education schools in Ontario. We are assessing the results and are taking corrective action when necessary to ensure that our standards are upheld. We have tightened standards for licensing driving instructors to ensure better-qualified driving instructors. We will not license a new driving instructor if they have a single demerit point or a Criminal Code conviction. A new, rigorous monitoring and audit process for beginning driver's certification and school licensing, which includes mystery shoppers, will ensure that our standards are being followed.

I want to quickly respond to the member from Oshawa, who talked about the zero blood alcohol. This is done in 50 American states and other Canadian jurisdictions. I can assure the member that zero does take into account some blood-alcohol content which might come from mouthwash or something.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Parkdale–High Park, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you to all the members for their questions and comments after I spoke. Certainly anything that makes our children safer is a good thing. I also didn't give kudos to the organization that I think is ever present in our minds as we discuss driving and alcohol, period, and that's MADD. So thank you, definitely, to Mothers Against Drunk Driving, because without them we would be living in a very different province.

Again I come back to driver education. I listened with interest to the comments that the government is tightening up on what passes as a school, what passes as a driver educator. But still the problem is access as well. Where you're paying over \$1,000 to have a young person trained, you clearly aren't admitting a great many young people to driver education. So I certainly would want to encourage the government to look at the Manitoba example where, with public auto insurance and public control, you can also deliver public education for young drivers in the schools themselves for only \$50, which is exactly where driver education should be and exactly what it should cost, if anything. I would encourage that, and encourage that they continue the exercise in democracy started by the young people in this province, and listen to them, actually meet some of those 141,000 young people who spoke up and changed the government's mind; get to know them, because these are the leaders of the future, and that means hearings and openness and transparency and that means committee time.

Again, we support it in its amended version and hope this helps.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I do have prepared notes to speak to today with this debate. But in addition to some prepared notes, I have some from constituents from my riding. But before I do that, I would like to add a little context to the debate. I'll start with a reference to the Minister of Transportation this morning, who of course said, "Our roads are always declared to be the safest in North America. There's much more we have to do, however, and that's why we introduced the legislation that, if passed, will help make them ... safer." I think we do have the safest roads. Nobody is denying that. But we want to make them safer. Just how safe do we want to make them? And remember, whenever there is an action there is also a reaction. The only way, it appears, that this government wants to make our roads safer is by diminishing the number of people on the roads; restricting and preventing people from driving.

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I represent a rural riding, a riding where a personal automobile is the only form of transportation. We do not have access to GO trains, we do not have access to subways, we do not have access to public transportation. Personal automobiles and motorcycles are our form of transportation. I do recognize that the minister has men-

tioned some amendments to this bill. I hope that he didn't look on Facebook, because we all know that's banned for MPPs and civil servants. I hope he didn't sneak a couple of peeks at Facebook to see the opposition building to this bill. But we have safe roads. The only means of practical transportation in rural Ontario is under threat with Bill 126.

Mr. Jim Brownell: It is not.

Mr. Randy Hillier: It is under threat.

Mr. Jim Brownell: It's not under threat at all.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Well, the honourable member from Stormont–Dundas would like to interject. I guess he does have the TTC up in Stormont–Dundas, but not the last time I was there, though.

I agree with comments from our other colleagues that it has been hastily drafted, poorly consulted. And I will have to also mention, in the leadup here, that the member from Huron–Bruce said they are demonstrating their commitment to public hearings and openness and transparency. Of course, there has been no debate from the other side on this bill. I guess that's what they mean by demonstrating their public commitment.

Another Liberal priority has come before this House, and it's clear to me and to everybody in my riding what the true Liberal agenda is. The Liberal agenda is not our hundreds of thousands of lost jobs, nor is it the long wait times and our doctor shortages. It is not about securing quality education and it's not about providing a safe, secure and just society. No, the Liberal agenda is, as Milton once said, a vain wisdom and false philosophy, and it is an agenda that demands people surrender our freedoms and subject ourselves to this monster of inefficiency and incompetence—the Liberal nanny state.

There is a role for us. There are important and significant roles for government: to create a responsible society, not to diminish individual responsibility; to ensure we have economic opportunities for prosperity and that our children have opportunities to receive quality education; and that everyone has access to timely medical care. These are but a few of our—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I'm sure the member is going to get to commenting on Bill 126, amendments to the Highway Traffic Act?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes. Instead, the Liberals bring closure to the debate, to all those fundamental obligations. I do understand the Minister of Transportation has back-pedalled on Bill 126 somewhat, but Bill 126 is a piece of legislation that will enshrine discrimination of age in statute and make discrimination lawful. Bill 126 does not stop there; it also empowers the police to be both judge and jury for drivers under the age of 22.

Interruption.

Interjection: Turn your BlackBerry off.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Sorry about that.

It appears to me that this government's prerogative is to limit judgment, deny responsibility, restrict freedoms, and break our long-held traditions of common law and respect for those under the age of 22.

I've come to know in the last year, and as a representative of Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington and as a legislator in this House, that you can never be sure what will come out of the mouths from the other side. One day it's against discrimination; the next day it's in favour. One day their hand is writing about law, order and justice, and at the same time the other hand is crafting up legislation to seize private property.

I would like to just talk a little bit about the comments I've been receiving about Bill 126 and let everybody in this House know what the people in my riding think of this Liberal nanny state legislation.

I'll start with a fellow named Austin Kirsh. I can't repeat what he prefaces his quote with, but "a piece of legislation that disenfranchises someone else is introduced by an entity such as MADD. Charities are for giving assistance to others, not preventing law-abiding citizens from sharing the same freedoms as other law-abiding citizens." He went on to say that "honourable is not eliminating the freedoms of many to accommodate the extreme ideology of a few." That is from a constituent named Austin Kirsh. I believe he's about 20 years of age.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Smart, though.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Smart fellow, articulate, and even he, our youth, can see through this.

I remember listening to Mike Huckabee earlier last year, and I think this would be an important one for the minister and all members of this House to remember. Mike Huckabee said, "I don't need a poll to figure out what I believe." Neither do I. I don't need a poll to understand what's right and what's wrong. These ought to be intuitive to every member in this House. If it is not intuitive, what is right and what is wrong, then you're in the wrong House.

I'll go on to speak about what Dana Dennis from Carleton Place said, that "the proposed changes are draconian and will have no impact on the safety of roads" in Ontario, and, "I only hope my provincial government has better things to do than enact such foolish legislation."

We can all see that government does have better things to do. I talked about it briefly in my notes. We have real priorities in this province. We have people out of work, we have infrastructure falling about, and here we are going to debate Bill 126, which allows that if you're under the age of 22 and you get caught speeding, you can have your car taken away.

I would hazard a guess that every individual in this House who has a driver's licence has sped beyond the speed limit at one time or another. However, only if you're under 22 are you subject to these new and terrible regulations.

Here is what Tom Morrow from Carleton Place said: "I am disgusted that our government would take such actions against our youth. Clamp down on speeders, drinkers, but if someone passes all the hurdles to get their licence, then treat them as equals." Treat them as equals: Isn't that a novel concept? Treat people as equals once they have demonstrated their competencies.

This is from Allan Niittymaa in Perth: "while I sympathize with those who have suffered a loss, this limitation is too restrictive for the majority of responsible youths."

I'm glad this one amendment has been proposed by the Minister of Transportation; otherwise, we would not be having RIDE programs on the roads but birth certificate inspections. I'm glad they have seen the light from their public opinion polls.

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Here's one from Pat Campbell: "Too often, laws are made for the people in the city. Rural Ontario is affected way more than our politicians realize." Let's get out of the House from time to time and actually see what the consequences are, see the harm that is being done. Bear in mind, again, that our tradition of common law recognizes the inherent and innate responsibility of people.

Common law is a little bit different than most other laws. Common law doesn't tell you what you can do; it tells you what you can't do. It doesn't prescribe a process; it rejects illegitimate actions. That's our tradition in this province, in this House—common law. From piece after piece of regulation, we see that that concept is foreign and absent to members of this Liberal government.

Here's one from Frank Pinder, from Inverary: "Government is stepping too far into governing the lives of young people and families with some of these rules."

Here's one from Kerry Ferguson: "This is nanny state legislation which will severely curtail the activities of all young people, and their families, because of the careless actions of a few." This is a good one, but it was written before this morning's announcement: "It will result in teenagers still carrying multiple passengers to and from events and activities, but now they will be hidden down on the backseat floor with no seat belts on. Don't laugh; it will happen. You will read about it when the first tragic accident happens." Thankfully the minister recognized that we ought not to be encouraging our youth to be hiding in the backseat without seat belts.

Here's one from Chuck Andary: "All I am asking here is that this generational discrimination ends." I think that's a pretty fair comment, a pretty sensible comment, one that we all ought to be able to agree with.

We have so many. Here's one from Eddie Doran, that this is "a great imposition on the personal freedoms and civil liberties of Canadians and visitors to this country alike"—an imposition on personal freedoms and liberties for ourselves and for our visitors. Everybody can see that there ought to be, and there are, significant priorities that we ought to be dealing with. But this Liberal government just keeps churning out—they've got a mill that operates on a 24-hour nanny mentality; it just keeps churning them out day after day. It never stops.

Here's one from Katie-Marie McNeill: "This is complete and utter discrimination against a group of people based on age."

What are we doing in here? What are we doing on the other side of this House bringing in legislation that is

discriminatory, bringing in legislation that breaks with our traditions? Is there any time to reflect and think about what you on the other side are doing, or are you just too busy going to photo ops and handing out cardboard cheques? I don't know. There ought to be some time to think about what we're doing.

This from Pat Campbell: "We live in the country. Everything involves travel." Everything. Speaker, it is clear to everyone that this bill is a distraction from the important concerns and priorities of the people of this province, but it doesn't fool anybody. You're not going to dupe anybody. You're still going to have to step up to the plate someday and address the real concerns and the real priorities of the people in this province. You can keep that nanny state red-tape mill working all the time; it doesn't fix anything. Step up to the plate. You've been elected by the people of this province to stand up and hit them a home run, not just to knock out foul balls all the time. Stand up and do your job. Let's respect people, respect their freedoms and respect justice even if they're under the age of 22. Let's respect them all.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise to comment on the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington—I hope I got them all in the right order—and what he had to say. I think what was important in his comments was the fact that he has actually consulted with his constituents and his constituents with him. He has taken the time, and they have taken the time to write to him about their feelings on this proposed bill, and obviously there were more than a few who were unhappy, particularly with the provision that was withdrawn today. I think that brings to mind what most of the rest of us have been hearing from people, young and old, across this province: that although we appreciate making tougher laws against drunk driving and although we want more safety on the roads, we are unwilling and unable, and we should always be unwilling and unable, to target young people.

There is no evidence, to my mind, to prove that they are any more likely than other drivers to get into accidents as a result simply of their age. I would grant that they may get into accidents more likely because of the fact that they have not been driving for as long a period of time, and perhaps with youthful exuberance things happen. But, quite frankly, I believe that young people can be as safe a driver as anyone else. So I commend the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington for what he had to say and for bringing the views of his constituents home to the Legislature. I didn't find anything he said today all that outrageous.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I appreciate the comments from the member for Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington: sometimes a bit fanciful but always entertaining.

I just want to say to the member that I'm not exactly sure, from his presentation, what particular parts of this

bill he is not in favour of. If he's not in favour of the zero blood-alcohol content restriction for drivers 21 and under, then he probably does not know that those 19, 20 and 21 have the highest rates of involvement in both fatal collisions and collisions overall. The involvement rate in fatal and injury collisions is 28% higher than for drivers aged 22 and 24. He probably does not know that all 50 states in the United States of America have the same blood-alcohol rule and that that has significantly, in those jurisdictions, lowered the number of young people killed in collisions. He probably does not know, or hasn't researched carefully enough—and I'm just here to help—and I'm sure the public hearings will give the public some more opportunity, that, overall, drinking and driving still account for 25% of the fatalities on our roads today. I represent a rural constituency and I would suggest to him that his looks absolutely urban compared to mine.

I want to say that I've heard some concerns. The minister has acted on those concerns today, with the number of young people in a car at one time in the G2 part of their licensing. But I want to assure him that people who have their G licence—in other words, who have gone through the licensing—with very little difference other than those under 21 for blood-alcohol content, are able to—

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I'd like to take a few minutes here to comment on the issues of Bill 126 and congratulate the member who spoke from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington—that's a big, long name—and many of the things he said are so true.

I also, though, would like to thank the minister for taking the most offensive part of this bill out. I think this shows that actually sometimes the House works. I know a lot of the times it doesn't, but this is one time that I believe that the government has listened to the rural members of all three parties here and the northern members, because this bill was offensive to rural and northern Ontario. We don't have the TTC running down the road and a lot of our people do not have another way of getting to events. This bill, the way it was first written, would have been really offensive, as I said, and so I'm pleased that the minister listened, but I think it was an effort on all parts. I'm sure the members from the governing party, the rural members and the northern members, spoke to him, and he also listened to us on this side. That is nice to see happening, especially when we're coming to Christmas and we'll soon be adjourning, to see that in some cases the House works.

I'm disappointed in other things; there are other things in the bill that we are concerned about. This bill partly is due to a horrific, terrible accident that happened in Grey county not very long ago, and there were a number of teenagers who were killed. I know this is part of the bill and the people who were involved there worked very hard towards this. But when we came to that one thing

that was in the bill that was really upsetting—lots of letters, lots of e-mails came into my office concerned about it, and this will help us go a long way to solving that. So I'm looking, when it goes out to comment, to getting some more ideas to help make the bill better.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I certainly listened with intent to the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington. We couldn't be farther apart politically and in many ways, but I do hear his concern for ageism in this particular piece of legislation. As New Democrats, we're concerned about it too. Very simply, if zero per cent alcohol level is good news for those 21 and under, then it's good news for everybody. I think those who are obviously involved in this, from MADD, would agree that we need stricter levels around alcohol consumption for all folks in Canada and in Ontario, not just for those 21 and under. I hear that and I think it's valid.

I would point out—it came out of the Auditor General's report today—that we also need to look proactively at what we're going to do about those who continue to drink and drive. For example, the AG today pointed out that 90% of those with addiction issues are not helped in this province. There's no program for them, there's no provincial addiction strategy to deal with them, so that's something they should be looking at along with this.

Again, if they're being open and transparent about the process and listening to the voices of those 141,000 young people, perhaps they will hear—some have suggestions about what to do about the growing rate of alcoholism and addiction among the young in this province—and do something about it. So that's the kind of action that we need.

Certainly, I heard the sense of frustration with a government that passes bills that are kind of motherhood and apple pie when we need some real action around the outrageous job loss, the outrageous poverty rates of this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I want to thank the members from Beaches–East York, Parkdale–High Park, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and, of course, the member from Algoma–Manitoulin. It was interesting when I heard him trying to justify the merit of discrimination—why we should discriminate. Well, all his justification and rhetoric about why discrimination is acceptable is still not acceptable to this representative here.

The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound mentioned that the odd time the House does work. He was congratulating the Liberals on that, and that's very true. Unfortunately, it is the exception, not the rule, and we ought to be elevating our expectations here in this House that it does work all the time, and the days that it doesn't work would be the exception. Wouldn't that be an interesting thing?

I'm going to end off by putting one more quote here in Hansard, because I think it puts things in the proper perspective: "The public good is in nothing more essentially interested, than in the protection of every individual's private rights." That was written by Blackstone, if the member from Algoma–Manitoulin hadn't read about that. That's what it is: equal private rights, not justifying discrimination of age under any other dubious distraction.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: I anticipate that I am likely to be the last speaker or the last debater from the New Democratic Party on this particular bill. Perhaps the reason I am going to be the last one is that the minister stood in his place today and withdrew the most egregious portion of the bill, having, I think, succumbed to the 150,000 or so people who submitted their names and their comments on Facebook, and come to the firm understanding that the bill simply, in this one regard, had gone too far.

Because that has happened, I believe it is now incumbent upon all of us to support the provision of the bill and to see that it goes to committee, where we can hammer out what is left in it. There are still some things that I feel need to be tweaked and some things that need to be changed. But certainly, inasmuch as the provision that disallows people under the age of 21 from riding in cars with their friends, from carpooling and doing the like has been withdrawn, there are not the serious concerns that many of us had at the outset.

Having said that, a couple of points I think need to go to committee and need to be determined. I listened with interest to the member from Oshawa and the whole issue of blood alcohol. I also heard what the member from Algoma–Manitoulin had to say about that. But, although I doubt very much that a sip of sacramental wine will give you a blood alcohol limit that can be read or that mouthwash will do the same, I'm not quite so convinced about the impairment that follows taking more than two or three spoonfuls—although I don't think you should do that—of Benadryl. I know, having taken that myself, the—

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: With a couple of glasses of wine?

Mr. Michael Prue: No, not even with a full glass of wine, just all by itself. I know quite well how that can momentarily cause you some considerable angst in your ability to walk and to drive.

I would like to hear some expert opinion on that, and I'm hoping if it goes to committee someone can explain and assuage the fears that he has and that others may have that taking something like a cough medicine will not impair people to that point that they will find themselves in breach of the law and at risk of losing their driver's licence. I just need to hear that.

The second thing that I think we need to talk about is the whole issue of driver testing. I had an opportunity, as I'm sure many members did over the weekend, to read the Toronto Star, about the driver testing provisions. We

know the auditor has already commented on the driver education, and I'm happy that the government has taken some small steps towards resolving that difficulty, but now we have the whole problem of driver testing. And it seems to me patently unfair that one can take all the same courses, do all the same things and have a 46% failure rate or 48% failure rate in and around the city of Toronto and in Brampton, and then other locations like Sault Ste. Marie and Kapuskasing would have a 10% failure rate. It seems to me that there's no empirical proof that the drivers in and around Toronto or the GTA are any worse drivers than those from Sault Ste. Marie or Kapuskasing. They probably have access to the same kinds of people teaching them, the same kinds of parents who care and everything else. But it seems that the testing mechanism is not a fair one and that people are going out on to the road having been tested less than they ought to. I am not sure that a failure rate of 48% is justified, but I am absolutely convinced that a success rate of 90% is not justified either and that we need to take a really strong, hard look at whether or not people are getting licences who ought not to be getting them in some of these locations.

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I think we also have to look, when this goes to committee, at the whole issue of insurance and insurance as it's related to traffic tickets, particularly. We know that young people pay huge rates of insurance in this province. We know that if they apply for and obtain a licence, their insurance rates are likely to be two or three or four times higher, through no fault of their own, than if they were older than 25. This is particularly true of young men. I do not have any children, but if one has a son or daughter who is of driving age and is added to the insurance, every single member in this place will know what happens to the family insurance rates at that time.

I want to compound that with the whole issue of traffic tickets, which is still part of the legislation. It's contained within the body of the act and not the regulation that was withdrawn today. That is, it will be possible for young people with a G2 licence who are convicted of an infraction and get a ticket to lose their licence.

If I go 10 kilometres over the limit in this province, what happens is I'm going to get a ticket probably in the range of \$25. I'm more than likely going to court to fight it, but I'm still going to get a ticket of only \$25. If it happens to a young person, they won't get a ticket for \$25; they will get a suspension of their licence—

Mr. Michael A. Brown: No.

Mr. Michael Prue: No? They're going to get a ticket for \$25, that's all? Has that been withdrawn, too, my friend?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: No. I'll help you in a minute.

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay, but the severity is there.

Once they get a suspension, what happens to the insurance rate? That's the point I'm trying to make, what happens, because the penalty that is let upon them is much, much higher than it is to the rest of the driving population. They have an infraction, and indeed it is not

impossible. The roads are very complex; we all know that. People inadvertently do things. You may not think you're going too fast.

I can speak from experience. One of my friends and my colleagues got a ticket a few weeks ago for going 50 kilometres along a road in Toronto. It is posted at 50 kilometres, save and except that there is a sign that when the school is in session, it goes down to 30. There's a school on the street. She was unaware at that point or was not thinking about the time of the day, was actually going 40 and got a ticket for going 10 kilometres over the limit whereas the street when the school is not in session is a 50-kilometre limit. These are the kinds of inadvertent things that happen to people. I think there was no intent there of speeding and there was no intent of being unsafe.

I am worried that a young driver in a circumstance like that, a young driver who misses something they should have seen on the road, a sign that the speed limit went suddenly from 80 kilometres down to 50 kilometres as you are entering a village, and didn't see the sign, will find themselves in some very serious consequence, not only with the possibility of losing their licence but also with insurance rates that are jacked up.

That long sort of diatribe and scenario goes down to the point that I also hope that when the government sends this to committee, we can have representatives of the insurance industry. I think we need to know what is going to happen in view of this legislation and how it is going to impact the insurance industry in Ontario, and whether young drivers who through no fault of their own, maybe through inadvertence or inexperience, find themselves having broken one of the myriad of laws in this province relating to traffic will not have their licence suspended and will not have their insurance rates jacked up to the point that it is no longer economically feasible for them to be on the road.

I hope all of those things will happen, and as I said, I will be supporting the bill now that the egregious portion has been withdrawn. But I am hoping at committee that the rest of the fears that have been expressed both by the members of the official opposition and by us in the third party can be assuaged and that the government can assure young drivers that they will not be treated in a way that is different from others. There is a point to be made that inexperienced drivers need to be dealt with in a way that is very careful for the long term, but it cannot be something that is simply a matter of age. Having said that, I will yield the floor to others.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I'd like to thank my colleague from Beaches–East York for his thoughtful comments and just assist him a bit. He was talking about licence suspension, I believe. Just to clear this up, convictions for Highway Traffic Act offences that attract demerit points, including speeding above 15 kilometres over the limit, and court-ordered driving licence suspensions under the Highway Traffic Act are the kinds of things that would attract these penalties. For the first one,

you would receive a 30-day licence suspension; for the second, a 90-day licence suspension; and the third one would see a cancelled licence and you would go back to G1 and start the whole process over again. This is for G1 and G2 drivers, not for people with G licences, and it applies to people of all ages who are novice drivers. I'm trying to be helpful with that.

The government is very much looking forward to public hearings on this bill. We would hope that thoughtful people will bring forward thoughtful representations that need to be considered. I suspect that if there are reasons to alter another part of the act, the government would be very interested in doing that. We want to continue to be open to all good suggestions to improving the act and making sure that our roads continue to be the safest in North America.

Mr. John O'Toole: I always listen to the member from Beaches–East York. In his leadership role, I'm sure he'll bring civility to his comments, and that's important. I wish him luck in his leadership pursuits. I'm not sure if he is part of the coalition, but that's for another debate.

What I do think is important, though, is the age of 21. I want to compliment the minister for having the sense—the common sense, technically—to remove that part of the number of young people. I think the young people have spoken, and it is important to recognize that they have been heard. That's what communication is about: There is a transmitter and a receiver.

There is one part here that I think the parliamentary assistant, the member from Algoma–Manitoulin, would perhaps like to know. As I said before, I think there are a couple of bills on Highway Traffic Act amendment, some of which deal with the technology piece, and this has to deal with the blood-alcohol piece.

I'm not responding to the Toronto Star, although I recognize fully that the Toronto Star is the briefing notes for the Liberal caucus or cabinet, and that's fine. It's a respected paper from the left side of the spectrum. But what is important there is the driver education component—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: You should listen to this. I've said to the minister, repeatedly and respectfully, that they could enhance and improve driver education. The roads today, with the expectations of the impatient driver and road rage etc.—it's very important to bump up driver education. I would encourage the minister, under positive advice, good advice, to strengthen driver education. Show them the accident statistics for young drivers, for the impaired-driver argument. These are important education tools to strengthen the driver education course. The member from Beaches–East York mentioned that. I think it's important, and I support his comments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: One concern that is overlooked in all this—I think the member from Parkdale–High Park mentioned it—is that there is a very stark reality that is too often faced by families and friends where young people are caught in these horrific accidents.

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Colle: I know some members are laughing across the way, and I find that really unfortunate. But there are many young people who sometimes think they are invincible, who sometimes drive cars that are almost too tempting. I always ask myself, why do we allow cars with 350 horsepower on our roads when the speed limit is only 100 kilometres? And the Conservatives, again, don't agree with this type of tough new measure. We need to send a strong message to young people because they need our advice in terms of taking their driving responsibility very seriously. When we are young, we sometimes don't stop and reflect on the fact that driving is not only something we should take seriously but that impacts not only on our lives but all the innocent people on the roads, and all the pedestrians.

1450

That's the message we have to get out, and I think that's what the minister is trying to do. He's trying to say that this type of activity, especially related to alcohol, is extremely volatile, extremely dangerous to everyone, not only to the drivers themselves. That's why 50 states have incorporated the zero tolerance for alcohol in young people. When they've done that, the number of accidents and fatalities has decreased dramatically. That's why we have to look at this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The member for Whitby–Oshawa.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I appreciate the opportunity to just lend a few remarks to the comments made by the member from Beaches–East York, which in my view are quite sensible and very thoughtful and certainly reflect a lot of what I have been hearing in my riding with respect to Bill 126. As it happens, in addition to having three teenaged sons in my household, and I've heard a lot from them about it, I've also had the opportunity to speak at several high schools in the last few weeks, and this is something I have heard loud and clear from young people about their views with respect to this legislation. I really don't think we're giving young people enough credit here. I know there are situations where there are some youth who are not responsible, but there are certainly lots of adults who are not responsible as well. When speaking to our local chief of police, as I have over the last few days, he tells me that the number of charges for drinking and driving has actually gone up, instead of down, over the last couple of years, which is a real shame. I know we need to do something about it. But it's not just young people; a lot of that is people my age and older, getting to be more senior people.

I think we need to bear that in mind, as we're debating this legislation, and take a look at it for what it's really meant to deal with. Certainly the young people I listened to spoke loud and clear about their issues with respect to not having more than one person who is not related to them in the vehicle with them. I'm very glad to hear that the minister has stepped down from that. But in all honestly, is this the way to create public policy: to throw

something out there without proper consultation and then see how many Facebook hits you get on it, and then say, "Well, maybe that's not a good idea"? So I think we really need this government to commit to full public consultation on this before we go through, to make sure that we are going to end up with the kind of legislation we really want to see in this province that balances the interests of the state with the interests of individuals.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Beaches–East York, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Michael Prue: I would like to thank the members from Algoma–Manitoulin, Durham, Eglinton–Lawrence and Whitby–Oshawa for their comments. Time will only permit a response to two of them. I thank the member from Algoma–Manitoulin. Yes, I did talk about 10 kilometres, and of course you are right at 15, but it still does not take away the statement I was trying to make. Even in inadvertence, 15 kilometres can have very disastrous consequences to someone who is a young driver, having their licence suspended, and certainly far more than the consequence that would accrue to me and to drivers who have been out there for a long time. I think we need to weigh that and weigh the penalty of the law as well as the consequences and how that reflects on insurance. So I am looking forward to that kind of public debate during the committee process.

I also would like to thank the member from Whitby–Oshawa for her comments. In fact, she is absolutely right about people who are drinking and driving, and young people and how they are looking upon this because, you know, in fact it is not young people who are the majority of those who are drinking and driving. It is not young people at all. In fact, the statistics will tell you and the industry will tell you and the police will tell you that those who are caught drinking and driving tend to be males between the ages of 25 and 30. Then it goes down, and then there is a spike back up in males between the ages of 43 and 50. And for women, it's women in their late 30s, although it is not nearly so high as the number of males who are caught drinking and driving.

But that is where the problem lies. It is not with those who are between the ages of 18 or 16 and 21 who are out driving in their cars. Although they can, of course—anyone can drink—it is not they who are breaking the law. And I think we have to remember that in everything we do. Although we have to have a zero alcohol limit for new drivers, it is not the young people who are to blame.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise in the House today to challenge many of the assumptions made by the Minister of Transportation in Bill 126, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act.

I am well aware that this past summer, as has tragically been the case in prior years, we have witnessed the deaths of far too many young people in car accidents, many of them involving speed and alcohol or both. The reaction, however, by the McGuinty government is to tar all young people with the same brush, and that is patently

unfair. Also known as the Road Safety Act, 2008, Bill 126 will drastically change the laws for young drivers in Ontario. We can all agree that the lives of young people are precious, and we should do what we can to help prevent further tragedies on our roads. However, it's clear from the government's last-minute repeal of the passenger restrictions for young drivers that they have not done their homework, and because there has been absolutely no formal consultation, the minister did not make any further changes which should be made to this bill.

If they had bothered to actually consult with the youth of Ontario, and also their parents, they would have realized that this legislation was not ready to be rammed down the throats of Ontarians. My caucus colleagues and I were appalled by the lack of consultation in the initial stages of the policy amendment preparation.

I believe one of the reasons is that it is a reaction. It's a reaction to the overwhelming grief of a father for his son. I, like most Ontarians, regret tragedies like the one that befell the Mulcahy family. This situation strikes a nerve with all parents. However, it's our job as legislators to create policy for the greater good that is proactive, not reactionary. Bill 126 is classic Mr. McGuinty policy, where the left hand professes to support the youth while the right hand creates reactionary legislation that presumes guilt and is highly punitive.

Back in November, when this bill was announced, my office received a call. It was from a concerned teenager who has already jumped through every hoop the government placed before him to prove that he is worthy of a driver's licence. He was turning 18 that weekend and wanted to know if his friends were going to be able to carpool to his birthday party or if he needed to make alternate arrangements for them. I was so impressed by the conscientious nature of this young man. He wanted to know if the government was going to pass this legislation before his birthday, and find out what actions he needed to take to operate within the law. Clearly, the youth of today are actively engaged on this issue and have been totally ignored by this government. Does this sound like an irresponsible young person to you?

I want to congratulate all young people who have e-mailed their MPPs—and I know from the lists that I get that you've all received the same e-mails—and signed up on Facebook to protest Bill 126. You are a part of this new generation that is creating change through the Internet. You have quantified your disappointment in Bill 126, and it clearly had an impact on this government, as they have removed the passenger restrictions on young drivers.

I don't think that anyone could have imagined the impact that the Internet was going to have on our country, but it is certainly engaging a group of citizens whose voices we have rarely heard before. This is democracy in motion, and I am pleased to see this level of engagement on an issue this important.

1500

My young caller was not the only one. I have received hundreds of e-mails from students and parents alike who

are justifiably upset with Bill 126. I was particularly struck by the eloquence and thoughtful arguments of a young lady who wrote the following:

"I can see where the ideas for this legislation are coming from, as I too have looked at both sides of the argument. However, I still believe that it is targeting the wrong people and I believe it can be an unfair stereotype.

"While I don't condone drinking and driving, I think the focus is in the wrong place.

"I'm not stating that we shouldn't have laws because people don't follow them, but I believe it will be a few years before introducing zero tolerance would be effective.

"Implementing harsher penalties on the laws that already exist would be a good first step.

"You may or may not have noticed the fact that I never spoke of young people or of teenagers. However, I believe that, if passed, it's only fair to apply these laws to everyone.

"Some young people are irresponsible drivers, but some older people are irresponsible drivers; it's a fact of life.

"You can't honestly, with facts, back up the statement and tell me that a young person with a blood-alcohol level of 0.001 will be more likely to be involved in a collision than an older person with a blood-alcohol level of 0.08.

"Or say a 21-year-old is driving at 105 kilometres per hour on a highway but someone who is 22 is going 140 kilometres per hour on the highway. Who is more likely to create the most damage?

"Yes, the older person may have more experience driving, but at the same time, they may not. Many people don't get their licence as soon as they turn 16.

"I myself am 19 years old. I've had my G licence since I was 17 and I am as cautious of a driver as any person in their 20s, maybe in their 50s, and maybe more responsible than some of them. I have never been involved in a collision and never received tickets or been issued traffic fines.

"I don't think that my driving privileges should be taken away on account of doing nothing wrong, other than being a young person. I believe that would be unfair to myself and all other responsible drivers of my generation.

"If you're going to put new restrictions on drivers' licences, please apply them to everyone. I know that a lot of young people tend to speed, but so does everyone else. For example, turn on the news around the rush hour. There is almost always a collision on one of the 400-series highways and it normally involves adults on their way to or from work."

Well, bravo to young Amanda. She has clearly illustrated why this government needs to hear from more people, more young people, more people in general. They are currently operating on assumptions and stereotypes, and we have made it very clear that the McGuinty government needs to take this issue to the people, the people who are being pigeonholed for their perspective.

Why single out young drivers when the real issue is inexperienced drivers? This legislation is discriminatory and presumes wrongdoing on the basis of age.

I have dozens of e-mails that I could be sharing, but this next one clearly illustrates my caucus colleagues' and my frustration with Bill 126:

"These new laws go much, much deeper than just affecting when, where and how a person under 21 years of age can drive.

"These laws, coupled with our province of Ontario's rather high insurance premiums (especially for young drivers) have already and will continue to deny today's youth from gaining much-needed life skills and experience.

"Many will not be able to afford to drive, nor be permitted to drive if they make even one tiny mistake.

"Many may grimly say, 'rough. They will learn from their mistakes.' These people are not taking into consideration the seriousness of the effects these laws will have on a young person's life.

"With these new laws (which are overly and unrealistically strict) a young driver who commits a minor traffic offence will be subject to very stiff fines, court costs, lawyer fees, poor driving and/or criminal records etc.

"The fact that these laws discriminate and allow no lenience towards a simple, minor, victimless mistake, resulting in loss of licence and ensuing unpayable insurance premiums for young drivers is really hard to fathom for citizens (of all ages) of Ontario....

"Which brings to question how these laws were passed so quickly, despite the strong opposition against them.

"This country prides itself on being a democracy, however lately (as seen by the thoughtless and seemingly undebated and rushed passing of discriminatory legislation) our government has been teetering more and more towards being viewed as a mockery.

"My confidence and respect for my own government has been violently shaken."

"It should be made clear to Mr. McGuinty that this is not the type of attention he wants in order to get Ontario's youth to become actively engaged in their government. The fact that this new legislation was passed gingerly 'through the ropes and over the hurdles' with such little discussion shows the utter weakness and incompetence of our government in the present form. This needs to change!"

I can understand his passion, and we can all appreciate that the undemocratic way in which this legislation has been developed is incendiary.

Most young drivers take the privilege very seriously. They complete their driver education and improvement courses and do their part to be responsible and safe young citizens.

At this point, the bill is in its early stages, and therefore, it is a good time to get input from these very people who are confused about which stage the bill is in.

I want the record to note that the members from the other side are mocking and laughing.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: We're mocking because you're not paying attention to what's going on.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I read from an e-mail from a constituent. Please don't mock my constituents.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm not mocking—

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: The bill is in its early stages, and therefore, it is a good time to get input from people, young and old, rural and urban.

Over 110,000 young people have already provided their input by joining the Facebook page on the Internet. I welcome you to join that movement. This is grassroots democracy in action, and it is very exciting to see young people so engaged in an issue that clearly matters to them.

Given the interest shown in this policy change, my colleagues and I are demanding that the Premier and the Minister of Transportation must provide a full slate of hearings for public input so that Ontarians can continue to be included. Those in rural communities can have their say and those in urban communities. All interested parties deserve to have their case heard on this issue.

In order to best serve Ontarians, we have to make sure that the legislation is sensible, reasonable and enforceable while taking into account the practicalities of everyday life. Our party is not supporting this bill unless appropriate amendments can be made to it with regard to several things, including the reference to age 21 and also the speeding provisions. Given the concern expressed by the public, we are calling upon the government to send this bill for a province-wide consultation, a very public consultation that will give it transparency and accountability.

We are also making this request as this is a very important piece of legislation, and until amendments can be made to the age provision and the 30-day suspension for the first speeding ticket, I cannot support it.

With regard to the zero tolerance for driver's blood alcohol under 22 years of age, this legislation presents the potential for discrimination challenges because it targets drivers of a certain age, with everything else being equal. Therefore, we're recommending that the bill be amended to have this restriction apply to novice drivers and that the term be defined to include drivers perhaps in their first five years of being licensed. Focusing on the experience level of new drivers, rather than age, in applying special restrictions already has precedent given the nature of our graduated licensing system.

There are a lot of issues still with this bill. Even though the minister made the announcement today in a very peculiar way in an answer to a question rather than in a ministerial statement—that he was going to make changes to this bill—that is a good first step, but public consultation is imperative. It is being demanded by people in Ontario who have great interest to this. I suggest that that would be the next change the minister announces.

1510

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I think the member from Burlington certainly made some reasonable remarks this afternoon. I know that in my community I didn't need Facebook. I was in the small community of Warsaw, some 500 people, and chatted with many of the young people down there about this bill. And I was in Norwood, a small community of about 1,700 people—it's kind of the heartland of rural east-central Ontario—and had an opportunity to chat with them about this particular bill. Through the information we have all received—many of my caucus colleagues—this morning in question period the transportation minister, upon getting the question from my colleague from Huron-Bruce, withdrew part of the legislation that was certainly deemed by many people in the rural part of my riding to be unacceptable. He did do that.

When I talk to Mike Johnston, the detachment commander of the OPP in Peterborough, and Murray Rodd, the police chief for the city of Peterborough, one of the things they constantly talk about is the need to improve road safety. The worst position they find themselves in, as an OPP or city police officer, is when they have to knock on a door to tell a parent that there has been a death or a severe accident involving a young person. They all dread having to do that kind of thing. So when you talk to the detachment commander and the police chief in Peterborough, they welcome this kind of legislation, which they believe will significantly improve road safety in Ontario.

As I said, this bill will go to committee. There will be the opportunity to hear from presenters. There will be a dialogue between the three parties; perhaps the independent member will be represented too. There will be an opportunity to make some more amendments to this important bill. The bottom line is that it will improve road safety.

I hope the opposition enjoys their dinner this evening at Bigliardi's.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Our good colleague from Peterborough often attempts humour; he never really quite follows through, just like this government.

Bill 126 is quite an interesting bill. Obviously we know that constituents, particularly those in high schools across this province, have opposed this piece of legislation. We know that because over 100,000 young people joined a Facebook group opposing this bill, and of course today, during question period, the Minister of Transportation backed away, I might add.

For the first time in the last couple of weeks, we actually have the gallery filled with teenage drivers. I think it is really important that they are part of this discussion, because this bill only impacts kids your age. That is why it is really important that you're here, to know that this bill needs to actually go to you, the people who are between the ages of 16 and 21, and this government hasn't done that yet. This Liberal government put forward a bill based purely on emotion, and tried to run it through here.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: That's not fair, Mr. Speaker, absolutely not fair.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: But I'll tell you what is fair. This Friday, there were rumours and speculation that we would prorogue and this bill may cease to exist after that day. We may not go into consultation. That is what's really sad here. If you are going to put forward a piece of legislation that's going to impact an entire segment of the population and not consult them, then I'm not sure there is anything rational about this bill.

My colleague Frank Klees, our transportation critic—I think he is one of the better critics in this Legislature; I think he is a fine member of provincial Parliament—has done due diligence on this piece of legislation and has serious concerns. So I ask that members opposite make sure our views are heard.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to the member from Burlington. I've had the privilege of knowing the member from Burlington for a great many years, when we sat on municipal councils and did things together. She speaks from the heart, and she spoke with some considerable degree of knowledge about how this is impacting young people and how, in her dealings with young people, they feel singled out and that they have not been heard. I want to commend her because that has been my experience as well in going into high schools and going into community colleges to talk to young people. Even within our party, the Ontario New Democratic Youth, they felt that the bill was discriminatory and wanted to know how members of our party were going to deal with it.

She was right to raise that, but I am somewhat puzzled. I know we're supposed to be speaking about the statements made by the debater, but the comment made by my colleague Ms. MacLeod just a moment ago about the prorogation of the House I find somewhat strange. I'm not sure that the member from Burlington intends to raise this issue, but it certainly was raised by a member of her party. The prorogation of the House would kill the bill, so I don't understand how that would necessarily take away from the committee hearing. It would also take away from the bill itself.

I'd like to assure my friend from Burlington that her comments were spot on. I'm not sure that the other comments related it to it were, but we need to do everything we can within this Legislature to make sure that our bills are not discriminatory, that young people have the same access and the same opportunity and are required to follow the same laws as everyone else, and that the penalty ought not to be more severe because you are 18 or 19 years of age than if you are 65.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? There being none, the member for Burlington, you have two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I would like to thank the members from Peterborough, from Nepean–Carleton and from Beaches–East York. I am here representing the constituents in the riding of Burlington, and given everything

I've experienced in the House for the two years I've been here, this is the issue on which I have received the most e-mails. It has really raised the attention of a lot of people. Both young drivers and their parents are concerned about how this is all coming down.

Our party has always been a staunch supporter of making Ontario roads safer. There's no question that none of us would disagree with that. However, I really don't believe that by supporting this bill in the way it has been written, we would be doing that. It has been written in language that is discriminatory, and I feel that it's setting a very bad precedent if the bill passes in its current state. It has had an enormous reaction, and I think that the only due justice this bill could have would be to take it for formal—formal—public hearings and allow the youth of this province and their parents to speak to it.

As the member from Newmarket–Aurora said, the bill would result in some unintended consequences to many young people, and I don't think that's what the intention of it was. The focus of the legislation should be to ensure that young drivers understand there are serious consequences behind a steering wheel, but that should be so for older drivers.

In the case of alcohol, why discriminate? Why is it okay for somebody older to drive with a higher level of alcohol content, just because they've been drinking for many more years or their tolerance level may be up? There's nothing in science to prove that. I think what's good for one here is good for all.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 126, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and to make consequential amendments to two amending acts. I will give the government credit: They've certainly managed to get the youth of our province engaged in issues happening here at Queen's Park like I've never seen before.

I'd like to use a bit of my time today to get some of the e-mails and comments that I've received from young people, particularly from the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka, on the record because I think the youth of this province have recognized that they are being targeted, really being discriminated against with this particular bill, and they've spoken up loud and clear. Some 122,892 Facebook users have joined the group Young Drivers Against New Ontario Laws. We've certainly never seen participation and interest from young people in a bill passing through the Legislature like this, I think it's safe to say. Of course, the part of the bill that has most aroused interest has been the restrictions on the number of passengers that a young driver can carry with them. I'm pleased that the Minister of Transportation today, in question period, has committed to removing that section of the bill. Now we'll just have to make sure that he, in fact, comes through and does remove that section of the bill.

1520

I would like to get some of the e-mails that I've received on the record. Many have come in to me and

they've been excellent comments, very thoughtful. Many are to do with that section that has now been removed, but let me quote this long, thoughtful e-mail from Kayla Rhiness, who wrote to me. She says:

"I am 18 years old, and will have had my G2 for 10 months as of December 7, 2008. I have never had an accident, or a ticket.

"I am writing to you today in hopes that you would be able to use this in the fight against these laws being enforced, or to somehow see how unjust these laws are. I am not your general complaining teenager, and because of the position I am in, these laws are going to greatly affect not only me, but the people I am involved with. I am a youth leader for the junior youth group at my church, Bethel Pentecostal Tabernacle in Huntsville.... It is not only my responsibility, but my duty to drive my youth to special events and conventions. These children range from being in grade 6 to grade 8. All parents have signed a waiver at the beginning of the year, granting their permission to drive their children when necessary.

"Now, what right does the government have to step in and lay down laws such as these, when there are plenty of people in responsible positions like mine? If this law was passed, then our youth group of about 10 to 15 people would really be at a loss. There is only my pastor, another leader, who is 19 years of age, and myself. That is just enough seats to transport all of our kids to whatever event we are going to (considering the fact that not all our youth can generally go—it normally ranges from about 11 or 14 that can). Now, take away the four available seats in my car, and the four available seats in the other leader's car. That leaves six seats available in the pastor's van, and two would be taken up for both of us leaders (because we have to go due to our 'plan to protect' policy, and for extra supervision). That leaves four seats available to approximately 14 children. Do you think that it is fair for 10 children that want to go to events having to miss out on the opportunity to grow in their faith just because the government felt it was necessary to implement these laws?

"I don't think so.

"Although I will have had had my G2 for a year as of February 7, 2009, there are still going to be events between now and then that I am going to need to drive my youth to. If this law is passed, for those two months we are going to need to find parents that are able to drive not just the youth but the youth leaders to events, which is ridiculous because we have been put in our positions as youth leaders for a reason—to assist the pastor, to help provide transportation, and to be there for our youth. May I mention that it is actually very hard to find parents whose schedules work with our youth timings?

"I am also a member of the local air cadet squadron, 844 Norseman, and every now and then I pick up or drive my cadets home if they don't have a ride. So if this law is put in place, a lot of my cadets will be put in a position to either pay for a taxi home or walk."

Another young person from my riding writes:

"My name is Katie O'Hearn and I am turning 16 in less than two months.... The one rule that I do not appre-

ciate is the one with limited people in the car. [The] reality is teenagers drink. At parties people have what we call a DD, a designated driver—a person that does not drink and is safely transporting their friends home after the party. I think there could possibly be a higher fatality rate ... people will think they can just drive themselves home."

A young driver from Muskoka writes:

"I'm e-mailing you in regards to the proposed legislation by Premier McGuinty for young drivers aged 21 and younger.

"Initially I wasn't aware that the proposed legislation would include me—I'm 21 with a G driver's licence with no record of being in an accident.

"I live in Port Sandfield but work in Bracebridge, so I often drive my cousins to school in town. I see no reason why I shouldn't be able to drive my two young cousins at the same time. How would I choose between one or the other? Also, if I was to get a speeding ticket and lost my licence, like the proposed legislation states, how would I get to work, or even get groceries for that the matter? I really think that this could negatively impact the lifestyle of people living in rural areas across Parry Sound-Muskoka."

Another e-mail, from Patsy Beynon, a parent living in Gravenhurst:

"I am writing this to let you know how upset I am with the new young drivers law. We, as many others in this province, have chosen to live in an area where there is no public transportation. Because of this our children need to use their, or their parents', vehicles for employment, education, sports etc.

"Many young adults carpool to Georgian College in Barrie, Orillia, Bracebridge or Nipissing or Lakehead University. Carpooling has enabled many to attend post-secondary education. It is difficult enough for many to attend and this new law would make it even more so.

"As Canadians, our ancestors fought for many freedoms which we seem to be willing to sit back and allow our politicians to take away.

"We have discussed this new law in my family and a number of my children are concerned about how it will affect them. We believe that it is discrimination. Does our constitution not state that we cannot be discriminated against because of age?

"A number of other issues that have been raised:

"It will affect drinking and driving as a number of these people have a designated driver, and now that person will only be able to have one other person with them.

"It will affect the employment that is available to these young adults.

"It will make it more difficult on families whose children participate in sports or whose children need a vehicle to get to post-secondary education.

"There will then be more vehicles on the road, which in turn means more gas, which affects the environment in a negative way."

Another parent writes:

"Hello Norm, I am a constituent from Gravenhurst. After reading the proposed rule changes for young

drivers, I wish to make my opinions on it heard. I disagree with limiting the number of drivers under the age of 19. This would mean that my 19-year-old son who is a very competent driver who has passed two government road tests to get his full G licence would not be able to drive to Orillia or Bracebridge to the movies with two of his friends. We don't have the luxury of public transport and our children rely on being able to drive with friends to get where they need to go. It isn't just movies but also after-school activities. We have taught our kids to carpool and limit their gas consumption. This throws that teaching out the window."

There are, of course, other provisions of the bill. Many of them are a cause for concern as well. They deal with fines, suspension and zero tolerance for alcohol. I would like to give you a chance to hear from some other families that write on those issues.

A constituent wrote:

"Good evening,

"I am not in favour of the proposed legislation to increase restrictions on young drivers. My two sons, 19 and 21, are both G class drivers who are responsible behind the wheel. The oldest has been driving for five years and has had his G for two of those. Both boys are away at an Ontario university and will now no longer be able to carpool home for holidays etc. as a result of this knee-jerk legislation."

Another e-mail from a young Bracebridge resident:

"Mr. Miller, I am distressed to hear about this new young driver legislation. This being a rural community, there is not a lot to do. So me and my friends like to go to Orillia and go to the movies. My friends are responsible drivers and have never been in an accident. Bracebridge doesn't have a lot to do on Fridays and weekends, so if you take this away, us kids will have nothing to do."

He goes on to comment on the provision for speeding:

"Does this happen to adults who get away with speeding? No! If making adults pay doesn't work, how will robbing us of our licences teach us anything?"

"Increasing the G1 probation time will not change anything—a good driver at eight months who took drivers' education will be just as good two months later. A not-so-good driver that is bad at eight months obviously isn't very good and two extra months, in most cases, won't make a difference.

"I'm sorry to say that these new rules only will make us young people lose faith and interest in our government. I'm sorry to inform you that a lot of us are extremely angry with this and will fight this. It is in the government's best interest to not put this into effect."

Another thoughtful young person from my riding writes:

"I am a young driver in Muskoka and will soon be going for my appointment to hopefully get my G2 licence. I wanted to take the time to discuss my opinions on the new laws that are trying to be passed. A guy I know of made a pretty good point. He stated that his car insurance is already sky high without having an accident or tickets, and now people are telling him how many

people he is allowed in his car. He has not had an accident yet and is doing whatever he can in order to save enough money to keep his car on the road. He doesn't even know if it's worth it anymore. I know of quite a few people that feel that way too, as I do. We, as young teenagers, have to own up to what we do and make responsible choices. There will always be those few that make the wrong choices and they should definitely get penalized for it, but that doesn't mean we all should.

1530

"One more thing I think is unfair about this is the fact that the age was set at 19. I know most of these laws all go by statistics, but many adults have accidents from careless or drunk driving. How come they don't have the same restrictions as younger drivers? I know many people that shouldn't even have their licence because of their lack of road and safety knowledge, or they are just plain careless while driving. I think this law was over generalized and should be reconsidered.

"Thank you for taking the time to read my thoughts and opinions. I am one of those young teenagers that is fighting to live my own life. I, along with a lot of other people I know, have been brought up and taught the safety of the roads and how to be responsible. These days, it seems that each way for us to become more of an individual and take on personal responsibility just gets taken away from us. Yes, there are tragedies, but let's take the time to deal with them individually instead of punishing all. Don't get me wrong; I understand where these thoughts of the law changing and reasoning is coming from, but I think things got taken a bit to the extreme in this situation. I hope you will think about some of the points I have brought up and realize what young teenagers think and feel about this as well."

Another young person writes regarding the new zero alcohol for drivers under the age of 21, and the one-passenger restriction:

"The current laws are good enough.

"This law is in response to the three youths who died this summer at Lake Joseph after consuming huge amounts of liquor and then travelling at high speed in their expensive and fast automobile. This is not indicative of how most youths drive!

"If someone can enlist and then die for our country at age 18, but at age 20 is considered a criminal for having one beer with dinner and then driving, then I am totally ashamed of this disgusting province and country. Can you can spell police state?"

I think the point is worth making that we already have laws—good laws—that, if enforced, deal with drivers of all ages equally and fairly.

This bill, I believe, has been very quickly put together, and the minister has indicated today in question period that he's willing to make a change to the one section to do with the number of passengers that can be carried in a vehicle. But certainly, speaking as a parent with four kids, I don't think it's necessary to have higher fines for young people and specifically targeting them out. I know with my own four children, all of whom drive, I've said

to them very clearly when they've started driving, "If you get a speeding ticket, that will be the end of your driving days, because I won't be able to afford to pay for the insurance at that point. Or if you get in an accident, that will be the end of your driving days, so you'd better be very careful about how you drive." So far, things have gone quite well in terms of their driving.

One of the things this bill does is to bring in a zero-alcohol restriction for people 21 and under. I would just wonder why we're making this age-specific. Does it not make more sense to just define what a novice driver is and make it apply to novice drivers, versus age-specific drivers?

I wonder whether extending the graduated licence—I believe it extends it from two years to three—is really going to make any difference. I'm a supporter of the graduated licence. All of our kids went through that process and took driver training, and I think it works very well.

As I've said, I think the extra penalties and suspensions for speeding are unnecessary because, as a young person, the penalty you pay in terms of increased insurance is very significant right now. I don't think it's necessary that we have these other changes.

There are some changes in the bill to do with the impoundment of vehicles, giving police the ability to immediately impound a vehicle for seven days, I believe it is, if a driver is driving under suspension. I support that. I think that makes a lot of sense.

I think this bill was obviously brought in very quickly. There's been one change that's been hinted at by the minister now. Hopefully, what will happen is that we'll get some significant input now, especially from the young people who are being targeted in this bill, and we'll have lots of public consultations around the province where they can further come out and voice their opinion. Obviously, based on the quality and the number of e-mails I've received from young people around the riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka, they have, in the short time since this bill has been introduced, become very aware of Bill 126 and are generally very much opposed to many aspects of the bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the time this afternoon to speak.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I do appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 126 and to make comments to the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka. I also just want to throw in, for good measure, response to the comments made by the member from Burlington.

I don't know whether or not they are just being a little bit devilish today by their comments. They know full well; they were in the House. They heard the minister say that we are listening to the public and have decided to remove that provision from our road safety package. Now, they know what that provision is. They were in the House. They get copies of Hansard. They know full well what happened in the House today. So I don't know if they're being misleading intentionally—I withdraw that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I don't know why they feel the need to do that. When I hear the comments about public consultation and going to committee, of course it's going to committee, and they full well know that. So I say to the members from across the way, we will continue with the committees as we have in the past. We stand on our record. We stand on our consultation.

But I'll tell you this: We do more than listen; we act on what people say. The comments that are made today in this House—that's not what I am hearing. So I say, don't be mischievous; we know what's happening, and the big guy up there is watching, too, who is being naughty or nice. Let's keep that in mind too. I encourage you to take the time, read the Hansard; you were in the House today.

The member from Parry Sound-Muskoka, the member from Burlington, get at it. Let's get going forward with the committee hearings. You didn't do that when you were in government, and it's just too bad you didn't.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Durham with questions and comments.

Mr. John O'Toole: We're actually responding to the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka, not the member from Huron-Bruce. I think she's been given a lot of notes to read; we'll leave it at that.

My thinking is this: The member from Parry Sound-Muskoka, with four children, knows of what he speaks. I think he should be listened to and responded to. I think it's important when he spoke—it's about the designated driver thing. I think there is a responsible culture in young people, and I think this is really the essence of a government on a breakaway, a government not accountable for anything.

We recognize the repentant tone of the minister today when he stood up and withdrew a good section of the bill. It just shows that they should take the whole thing back and redraft it. I'll be speaking here shortly, and it will become much clearer that the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka's remarks were extremely pertinent. When he thought and talked about his riding, his constituents, the people he heard from, I'm sure that members on the government side have heard that as well. In fact, it's true. Today, it's been demonstrated by, and I think respectfully, Minister Bradley doing the right thing. The only thing that was missing: He didn't resign.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Now, they're outraged, but no—he is minister responsible for bringing forward legislation that's been properly consulted on. In fact, there are 105,000 young people in Ontario, some of them in my riding, who have got it right. This was discrimination based on age.

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Now they've repented, and that's the part I respect. You should listen to the comments of the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka. If you haven't listened, which is probably the case, you should read them in Hansard tomorrow and say "mea culpa," because he was right

when he said to just listen to the young people. Don't always be on a negative rant with the young people of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I appreciate the comments from the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka. Obviously, he didn't hear what the Minister of Transportation said this morning regarding the number of passengers who can be carried during the first year of a G2 licence. That's what it was about. It extended what is already presently the case from midnight to 5 to all day. So, for the first year of G2, that was what was going to happen; the minister said, "From now on, that is not part of the bill. We will not be doing that."

We talk a lot about age discrimination here—and it's true: Driving is a privilege; driving is not a right. We treat drivers over 80 differently than we treat other drivers. We treat young drivers differently than other drivers in only one way, and that is that young drivers 21 and under will be required to have a blood-alcohol content of zero. That is the age discrimination here. There is no other age discrimination in this bill—none.

What we are trying to do is to keep Ontario as a jurisdiction with the safest driving roads in all of North America and probably the world. We are very proud of what we've accomplished in this province, and this is through the efforts of all three political parties. I don't think this is a terribly partisan issue. I do think that when our House leaders from all three parties—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Oh, and the independent member, my friend from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound—decide in terms of how long the public hearings will go, we have a very extensive canvassing of Ontario public opinion about a very good bill that will protect Ontarians on Ontario's roads.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I take great pride that our party pushed the Minister of Transportation to draw back from this disastrous piece of legislation, Bill 126. It wasn't until the opposition raised considerable concern over the provisions of Bill 126 that this minister saw the light. I talked to the minister before he withdrew this particular part of the bill, which is so, so bad for all of Ontario but, more importantly, rural Ontario or areas of the province which are less populated, and the minister continued to defend it until today, when he collapsed in terms of Bill 126.

I would like to congratulate our party and particularly our critic on this particular—

Interjections.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: —the former minister, Mr. Klees, on his opposition to this particular bill.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order. No, sit down.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will have a chance to speak to this—

Mr. Mike Colle: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I want to help out the member. The critic for—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Eglinton–Lawrence, that's not a point of order.

Member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Mr. Colle should know that Mr. Klees is the critic for the Ministry of Transportation and a former Minister of Transportation, like myself.

I believe that my good friend Jim Bradley, who has been a veteran of this House for some 31 years, understands when he's beaten, and I congratulate him on withdrawing these particular sections of the bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Parry Sound–Muskoka, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you to the members from Algoma–Manitoulin, Carleton–Mississippi Mills, Durham and Huron–Bruce for their comments.

The member from Huron–Bruce was talking about commitments that the government has made today. The minister said in question period, in answer to a friendly question, that he is going to remove the section to do with how many people ride in vehicles with young people. I would just say that this government has made commitments in the past that they haven't kept, like they weren't going to raise taxes in the last election, so we will be watching very carefully to make sure they actually follow through with this commitment this time. And I certainly have confidence that the Minister of Transportation will follow through after making a statement today.

I don't apologize, though, for getting on the record the record of the ideas and concerns of many, many young people from my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka who have written to me on this issue, because it's unusual for me to hear from young people. As I say, the government has been successful in engaging young people and getting them interested in this bill. So I'm pleased to get their ideas and concerns on the record.

In terms of what we would like to see going forward, we certainly want to see public hearings, extensive public hearings, not like the ones you did on Bill 119, the WSIB bill, where you had five hours at Queen's Park, but travelling around the province.

We do have some concerns about the restrictions and the discrimination on drivers under the age of 21; we think it should be novice drivers of any age. And we have problems with the automatic suspension for speeding, regardless of the speeding conviction. Those are a couple of the issues that we will want to see addressed in the bill. There are parts of it that, certainly, I do support as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I'm sorry, I yield the floor to my friend from Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Speaker—
Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): You started to speak. I would suggest that I recognized the member for Carleton-Mississippi Mills. You two can straighten it out later outside.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. I didn't understand that the member for Durham was going to rise at this time or I would have yielded to him.

I'm not only concerned about the imposition of more and more restrictions on young people of Ontario; I'm concerned about more and more restrictions on all citizens of Ontario. That seems to be the mode for this government. My philosophy of governing, quite frankly, is to protect the public when there is a significant risk at hand. I believe that this government is legislating in a lot of areas where they need not, and that the whole philosophy of this government is if there is any risk at all to the public, in any kind of decision-making capacity they have, then legislate it, legislate it, legislate it. We have seen that over and over again.

In fact, one of the funniest stories that came out was the ban on the ban with regard to clotheslines across this province, in terms of drying somebody's laundry. I'm told by people who know about the ban for municipalities making bylaws against banning clotheslines in the backyard that when this government made that ban against the municipal bylaws, there wasn't one—not one—bylaw in all of Ontario, in all of the 500-plus municipalities, against having a clothesline in your back yard. So the ban against the ban was totally bogus, and yet it was printed up in the press that they were doing this wonderful environmental thing etc.

Now, there are, of course, some condominium associations which ban this, but that wasn't what they talked about. They talked about banning municipalities from making this bylaw, which is the only thing they would have power over. So it was a bogus thing, and it was all done for politics. That's what we have, time and time again.

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I may say, with regard to licences for beginning drivers, that in the early 1990s I was very much involved in bringing forward the idea of graduated licences—we didn't have them in the early 1990s. We were in opposition at that time, and I went to our critic, David Turnbull, who later became a Minister of Transportation, and said, "There is a tremendous opportunity here for us to show leadership in the Progressive Conservative Party and put forward the whole idea of graduated licences coming to the province of Ontario." We brought forward that idea in a private member's bill in this Legislature to deal with that particular matter. But when you bring forward that kind of legislation, you have to be reasonable in the restrictions you place on people in our province, whether they be young or whether they be novice drivers, etc.

I believe that in bringing forward this kind of legislation, they have shown, particularly with them withdrawing part of the whole bill now, that they just reach out for the publicity of saying, "We're tougher on drinking laws, we're tougher on safety, we're tougher on this," and by nailing these people with unreasonable restrictions in terms of their lives, they try to prove that they're for safety, etc., instead of dealing with real problems we have in Ontario with regard to safety.

We heard from the auditor just today how dismal a record these people have with regard to commercial truck traffic and how, under their power in the last five years—this government over the last five years—truck traffic has become more dangerous in our province, where the percentage of trucks in accidents has gone up from 7% to 9% and truck inspections are down by 34% under the McGuinty government—

Mr. Bill Mauro: Well, let's hire more people.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I hear a member say, "Hire more people." We don't have to hire more people. Get the people who are on the job actually doing truck inspections. We find out that under your government truck inspectors are doing one and half inspections a day—one and a half inspections—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I'm listening carefully to the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills, and I'm sure he's going to get to Bill 126, the amendments that are before us.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I am. I'm talking about safety on our roads, and I'm trying to indicate to the government where they should go to improve safety on our roads. This ill-conceived bill will do little to prevent accidents on the roads in our province.

Mr. Bill Mauro: What's the part you don't like?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: They ask me what I don't like. I don't like the idea that this government comes out and restricts some of our population more than other parts of our population.

Interjection: Who are they?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Well, this bill is absolutely prejudicial against our young people without our young people having the right to come forward. If a young person goes 10 miles over the speed limit, his penalty is much greater than the penalty I would get. I don't agree with that. I agree that if you're going to take away a person's licence, whether they are a novice driver or an experienced driver, it should be the same. If you're going to take away a licence for 30 days because somebody went 10 miles over the speed limit, then it should be for all of us; it shouldn't just be for the young people.

This bill is unreasonable in terms of what it demands. We know that the speed limits in our province are ridiculously low. If you ever drive down the 401—which I do very frequently, back to my riding—if you went 100 kilometres per hour on the 401—

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: You're blown off the road.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: You get run over. I believe it's actually dangerous to go 100 kilometres on that road.

I don't think anybody goes under 120 kilometres on the 401.

Mr. Michael Prue: My God, I do.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Well, one of my friends back here says he goes less than 120. Fortunately you live in Toronto, and you have about 10 kilometres home and back. I've got 440 kilometres there and back. I've got to tell you, I don't go 100 kilometres all the way home and back. I do keep within the range where the police have accepted, in an informal way, what the speed limit is. Actually, do you know what? I don't think anybody is stopped for going up to under 130 kilometres an hour on our four-lane highway.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I got caught.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Lou says he got caught. I don't know what he got caught for. Lou, did you have your licence suspended for 30 days?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: No.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Do you expect that you're going to have your licence suspended for 30 days?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I paid my fine.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I just think this government continues on with making more laws which are unenforceable, and it has nothing to do with actually improving the safety on our roads. We saw that again in terms of this government making announcements. The Auditor General's report was a damning indictment of this government and how it runs its meat inspections, how it runs its truck inspections, its road inspections. The public accounts committee—I don't know how we're going to deal with it all over the next year, because there's so much in that report that this government should be brought to account for.

I want to thank the government for one thing with regard to Bill 126—are you listening?—because the great part of Bill 126 is that I have a lot more young people in my constituency who are interested in politics as a result of this. I want to tell you another thing: All of those young people are not going to be voting for Dalton McGuinty's government in the next election. They're not going to vote for you because they think you are unreasonable and that you are overly restricting their rights going forward.

The original bill indicates where this government is going with regard to young people. We heard again in the auditor's report what a farce it is with regard to this non-smoking campaign around which the government has sort of thrown a lot of smoke. All of their stats were blown out of the water today by the Auditor General. The fact of the matter is that more young people are smoking today than when this government came to power, and that's because all of the stats mean nothing because so many of the cigarettes are being sold illegally: \$500 million of lost tax revenue going right under the radar, and these guys are letting it happen time after time, and they even know about it.

I want to read some letters that I got from some of my constituents with regard to this bill:

"As a member of your legislative riding, I would like to voice my displeasure with the recent proposed amendments to the Road Safety Act; exclusively the ones increasing restrictions on young drivers. I believe these amendments are without merit and are based solely on two factors: public sympathy for Mr. Mulcahy's appeal to government and age discrimination. These restrictions unfairly punish those drivers between the ages of 17 and 21 who have clean records, and in my personal opinion, it is meant to appeal directly to parents, the majority of the voting base in Ontario.

"What first caught my eye about this legislation is the language being used by the Premier to explain why they believe this legislation will make a difference. Here's one example: 'We owe it to our kids to take the kinds of measures that ensure they will grow up safe and sound and secure. If that means a modest restriction on their freedoms until they reach the age of 22, then as a dad, I am more than prepared to do that.' That was Dalton McGuinty.

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"These kids are individuals touching up to the age of 22. They are adults, plain and simple. Parental instincts are one thing, but before you begin placing new laws on Generation Y youth, I would recommend putting yourself in those younger adults' shoes.

"Imagine being told you are going to be treated differently for the exact same indiscretion simply because of the statistics. Practically speaking, why should someone 21 who blows 0.04 be treated any differently than somebody 22? Why should someone 19 who is caught going 20 kilometres over the speeding limit be treated any differently than someone who is 50? Statistics can be a powerful tool to win an argument revolving around change. As an engineer and a lawyer, I'm sure you understand this better than most. However, they must be presented correctly and responsibly.

"The stats used by both the PC Party and the Libs mainly come from Youth and Impaired Driving in Canada: Opportunities for Progress, which is a paper by MADD which touts zero levels for those up to 21. I read this paper and the stats simply do not have the depth and modern relevance to warrant restriction amendments to the Road Safety Act. The paper goes on at length about the fact that younger adults are involved in more accidents and driving incidents, proportionally, than any other age groups. However, this does not mean we should automatically strengthen laws against them. An up-to-date analysis comparing provinces and their associated rules imposed on young drivers, such as speeding and passenger restriction, should be done before this legislation passes. Everyone in Ontario wants to see statistics showing youth driving accidents on the decline, but this legislation is not the answer. It might be music to the ears of some, but ultimately it is a shot in the dark."

We've seen a lot of legislation like that by this government.

"Please weigh the chances of potential benefits against the restrictions of freedoms of an entire age group. If you

were 21, would you want these types of restrictions placed on you?"

That was written to me by Graham Hill, who is 24 years of age, whom this bill would not and affect and who has driven for six years. But he felt very, very strongly about it.

That's what I've been trying to say and what I've said here today. This government never seems to measure the risks against the benefits of the legislation that they bring forward. Nor do they present to the Legislature, when they bring forward legislation banning pesticides, deposit returns or whatever, studies that back up their legislative framework. If in fact we had those kinds of documents before us, then we could make reasonable decisions with regard to the risk and benefit that the legislation brings forward.

We have in the past created a lot of laws with regard to drinking and driving, and some of those very laws are causing tremendous problems with regard to our court system, again pointed out by our auditor today: Our court backlogs now are larger than they ever have been. We have to be careful, when we implement legislation, that we don't cause problems in another area of our legal system as we go forward. I believe that this legislation, while having a few good points, has had a much more negative effect than a positive effect.

I believe, again, that this Legislature, and legislators in general, should try to retain as many freedoms as we have as individuals, try to keep as much freedom for our people as possible. Only when there is a significant risk—not any risk; a significant risk—to the population in general should we step in and legislate, as we did on things like seat belts, where there was an overwhelming amount of evidence with regard to that, or where we brought in legislation to deal with smoking in the workplace and smoking in general to protect others from second-hand smoke, another matter on which I brought forward legislation as far back as 1985 in this Legislature. I believe that you can legislate in those particular areas, but this government is going on and on about restricting our right to make choices. As we go forward, I think people are going to recognize that these restrictions (1) are unreasonable and (2) cannot be enforced.

I've enjoyed speaking about this. This is a bill which has a tremendous effect, particularly on the rural areas of the area that I represent, which is the smaller portion of my riding, but they have spoken out with one single voice that Bill 126 was an unreasonable piece of legislation and was bad: bad for the environment, bad for the families and bad for the convenience of those people living in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: It's always a pleasure to listen to the dean of the House, the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills. He speaks with some eloquence and passion on his particular view in terms of legislation that he equates to a nanny state.

I am not sure that I share all of the comments that he made, but again, he has done the tried and true thing: He

has related back to what his constituents feel. He has quoted at length a young man of 24 and how that young man feels that the rights of the minority, in this case the minority being the people under the age of 21, are being treated in this province.

I did not hear the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills specifically talk about what happened today in the Legislature, with the minister withdrawing the most egregious portion of the bill, but in fact there are still some elements remaining within the bill that he spoke to. It is my fervent hope, and I hope his as well, that we are able to resolve those in the committee stage so that those portions of the bill that he actually accepts and respects and wants to see go forward can in fact become law.

But it is very fundamental, I think, for him and for me—and should be for all members of this Legislature—that in the end the bill does not discriminate against one group of people. It would be equally wrong if a bill was brought forward that discriminated against those who were senior citizens over the age of 65, and I cannot imagine this Legislature passing or bringing forward such a bill. We have to be equally concerned when a bill targets people under the age of what used to be majority, at 21, when there is no substantive evidence that the bill will have the desired effect. I commend the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills, and I'll sit down with that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Thunder Bay-Atikokan.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased to offer a few comments on the 20 minutes by the member for Carleton-Mississippi Mills. I want to start by thanking our Minister of Transportation, Jim Bradley, who today in the House, as many people know—perhaps those just tuning in do not know that the minister made an announcement today in the House where he withdrew the provision of Bill 126 that was causing some angst, I think it's fair to say, for a lot of people. That was the part of the legislation that was going to limit the number of passengers that someone in a certain category of their licence would not be able to transport 24/7. Currently, it already stands, I think, at the hours from 12 to 5, and it was going to be extended. The minister today made an announcement that that section would be withdrawn, and I think I should thank a number of the members of our caucus who spoke at some length on this who had issue with this as well as members of the opposition.

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I want to mention as well to people who are listening and have an interest in this that, while we have already expressed I think quite clearly an ability to listen and acknowledge the concerns expressed by the public, by members of the opposition and by members of our caucus, I think it's important to acknowledge that this will likely go a step further and that, at committee, those groups that tend to still have an interest individually or as members of large organizations in this particular piece of legislation are going to have an opportunity to speak to it.

I want to mention, though, the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills was talking about the discriminatory

aspect of this legislation. At some point in his dissertation he talked about that, but just earlier on in his speech he had talked about how in the early 1990s he brought forward a private member's bill around graduated licensing, and I would suspect that contained within that bill there were some issues that put parameters on who could do what at certain times. What is before us today does no more than that; it's the very same thing.

I want to congratulate and thank my two sons, Dustin and Christian, who, over a large pizza and a little bit of refreshment, gave their very clear perspective on this. Both of them are driving now and have been for some time. They very clearly crystallized for me their positions on this, and I've used that in terms of coming to my conclusion as well.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm always pleased to respond to the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills in the hope that I'll get the last word. Nonetheless, he made some very good points, more specifically on the issue of bans. He was on the right track when he was saying that the current government seems to overreact or not react; in fact, sometimes they say things that they really don't mean. I think in this case here we've seen it again. With all due respect to the minister, he has done the right thing in this respect. I think Mr. Bradley is right on this, that he has backed off on the number of young people in a car. Now, that's the only good thing. I'm going to be speaking next, so you'll want to stay tuned, I suppose, but I will be commenting on the bill itself. I'll also try to relate some of the things I said to the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills, because he must have seen my notes—possibly—but I'm sure as a lawyer and an engineer, and a former minister, that he has more to say on this topic, if we would only have unanimous consent for him to have more than just two minutes to respond.

He is right when he talks about the auditor's report, and I'll mention this. This report is phenomenal. It's the largest one I've seen in 15 years. There's a lot in here and there's even some on transportation. I'll be commenting on that. But I think we should all pay close attention to any attempt in legislation to discriminate. This is the lesson learned in this debate today: Do not target individuals who don't warrant your wrath. If you can prove it, stand up and prove it; otherwise treat everyone fairly. That has always been our leader, John Tory's, motive; our critic's, who by the way is Frank Klees; as well as our member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills. He has been the Attorney General—I think he has. He knows, and I respect his comments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I always appreciate the comments of my friend from Carleton-Mississippi Mills. The only part of this bill that has any age discrimination in it at all is the—

Interjection: The speed—

Mr. Michael A. Brown: No, I can deal with that in a second, if you want—blood alcohol at zero for people who are 21 and under. That is the only age discrimination part in this bill.

Novice drivers in G1 or G2 will be treated the same, regardless of how old they are, so it is not age discrimination. It is where you are in the licensing system.

The member made a good point, and I thought an important point, that he was in favour of graduated licensing. Most of the provisions here, if he looked at the graduated licensing regime that was put in place by the NDP government of the day, most of these prohibitions are similar. For example, if you are speeding and get demerit points—and you need to get demerit points—for the first offence you would have a 30-day suspension. That is exactly the same. For a second offence, you would receive a 90-day suspension. In the old regime it was 30 days; now it would be 90 days for your second offence. The third offence would wind you back up, starting all over in G1. These are for G1 and G2 licensees, regardless of their age. So I just want to help the member with that particular point.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Carleton-Mississippi Mills, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I want to thank all of the members who spoke on this.

Yes, I did serve as a Minister of Transportation, and it's a tremendous ministry. They have a tremendous bureaucracy, and one of the reasons is because most of them are engineers. Engineers are good guys. You know that, Mr. Speaker.

To make the point that it's G1 and G2 people who would suffer a suspension of their licence for 30 days and that it doesn't matter how old you are when you get a G1 or G2—I would guess that 95% of the people who get a G1 or G2 are under the age of 21, and therefore it is discrimination, essentially, on the basis of age.

I often wonder whether or not someone is going to take this kind of thing to the Supreme Court in terms of a charter challenge. It's going to happen sooner or later. This government has already got slapped down on one law, as you know, and that was with regard to the adoption disclosure bill. They slapped them hard, and they had to bring in another bill, which is actually a bad piece of legislation as it now stands. This bill, I think, could possibly have a charter challenge to it, as well. Our Charter of Rights and Freedoms says that you can have age discrimination if it's reasonable. I don't believe, quite frankly, that this discrimination is reasonable, particularly with regard to the speeding and suspension of licences.

I thank my good friend Mr. Bradley, who was elected the same time I was, some 31 years ago, for having his sanity finally come to bear and taking out the passenger parts of Bill 126.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's finally my turn to put my thoughts on the record, on behalf of my constituents of the riding of Durham, and I do that with the greatest respect and privilege.

The starting point today is that if I was in my riding, I'd be standing on the bridge, saluting and respecting the

young soldiers' bodies being repatriated down the Highway of Heroes. I might add that one of them, a 21-year-old or younger, would not have been entitled to have his friends in a vehicle with him. We're saying that young people can't have more than one occupant in the car with them, yet they can serve their country and in fact give up their lives. It's important to put this sort of discrimination in context. You can serve your country in wars to defend our peace and civility; on the other hand, you can't respectfully and responsibly drive around the province with another person in the car. With good sense and respect, the minister has relented on that and has today stated that he will not invoke that section of the bill.

There are a couple of comments that I want to make out of respect for our critic, Mr. Klees, from Newmarket-Aurora. He has alerted us, as he is very diligent in his responsibilities as critic—and the issue here, that the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills mentioned as well, was the age issue of 21. There is some discrimination in that provision, as well. He said that putting forward an amendment to remove the reference to the age of 21—and the minister may do this; if not, there will be an amendment moved during hearings—and to refer to them, in a general sense, as novice drivers, new drivers, those who are drivers without experience, is a more appropriate way to reference the experience provision. Let's not assume that everyone 21 or under is irresponsible. That's the salient discussion here this afternoon.

1620

The automatic suspension for speeding is another provision that I think is arduous and troublesome for young people. They already pay some of the highest insurance rates in the world—that's been demonstrated—perhaps appropriately, but according to common laws, treating everyone equally is important. Having two sets of laws is simply not the right thing.

That really has become another focal point for many of the comments here today on Bill 126. Right now the age appropriate for drinking, which is a whole other debate, is 19. There would be those who would say this bill goes partway to addressing that issue of whether or not it's appropriate to have a drink and drive, regardless of your age. If they were really true to the principle here, I think it's inappropriate. In my own view—this is not the view of our party, particularly—one drink is one drink too many. I think most people would support zero tolerance in the novice driver group. In fact, in some of the evidence, I think even if you look at the age thing that's been mentioned here earlier, there's a whole group, perhaps the group between 40 and 45, that is the second-largest group to be stopped on these roadside RIDE programs during this time of year.

So I think we're in unanimous consent for a lot of sections of this bill, but I want to make it clear that our critic, Mr. Klees, has made it clear that there are a couple of sections we'd like to see some changes in: the reference to age 21, the novice driver and the automatic suspension.

The suspension and the impoundment are a whole other ball game. There's a section of the bill—and I'm going to refer to sections rather than just prattle on here. This is kind of an administrative bill. There's a lot of stuff in the fine print here.

Increased penalties: This is a section here, and there's a whole series of sections that change the fines. In section 106, for instance, on seat belts, which isn't directly related to the issue of drinking and youth, seat belt fines are going to go from \$60 to \$500, another Liberal tax grab. A careless driving charge, in section 130, is going to be increased from \$200 to \$1,000, to \$400 to \$2,000; and there are others. Running a red light is going to cost you—it used to be \$150; now it's \$500. These are tax increases. The Liberal solution to everything is to raise the taxes. So that's a section here that hasn't been discussed. The taxes here have risen five times, 500%. When you're targeting young people who always pay the highest insurance already—most of it is their parents paying it.

There are some very good, positive sections in the bill, too. I don't have really enough time here. If I could get unanimous consent to have an hour I could cover some of the important sections of the bill. I seek unanimous consent to have an hour.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member from Durham has—will the member for Durham take his seat, please?

The member for Durham is seeking unanimous consent to have an hour. Agreed? I heard a no.

Member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: That's shameful. There are so many sections of this bill that I—now, there's one here, the miscellaneous amendments section. That section I agree with. This is on the bicycle or power-assist bicycles. I think they've gone in the right direction here on that section of the bill. They have just recently been forced—I should say, Ontario's been forced by Quebec and BC—to recognize the ZENN vehicle: zero emission, no noise. About time they got on board. I've been arguing about that, with the electric vehicles; there's no reason why they wouldn't. We can agree with that section. We're on the record as agreeing.

Section 40 of the bill provides the Minister of Transportation—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: This is very important, and a lot of members here wouldn't know much about it, so I'd expect to have their undivided attention. Look up if you're listening. Very good. They're not sleeping. This is good.

Reciprocal agreements are very important, and I'll tell you why. A very close relative of mine—in fact, my daughter—was in Australia for about 10 years. I hope this isn't a conflict, but she was in Australia for, I think, 10 years. Prior to going there she had a full licence, finished university, went to Australia and met someone in Australia, got married and lived there for 10 years. Now, on coming back, she had to start with the G1 licence again.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: So there's no discrimination for age.

Mr. John O'Toole: The minister on the other side there, the one who discriminates against grandparents, is—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, no, she's talking to me. But my point is, when the people came—

Mr. Jeff Leal: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I'll take care of this one.

The member for Durham, please stick to Bill 126.

Mr. John O'Toole: The Minister of Community and Social Services is a fine person, and we all make mistakes.

But the point I'm trying to say here is this: When my daughter came home, she found out that someone she knew from the people they were involved with in Australia was coming here from another country. I'm not sure—it was somewhere in the Middle East. They were allowed to drive and they had never been licensed here. Here's the point: In this reciprocal agreement, people can come here from England and just turn in their English driver's licence and get an Ontario driver's licence. Someone coming from Australia comes here, even though they were licensed here, and they have to go to G1.

In my daughter's case, she had two young children, and she had to reinstate and get someone else to drive the children; it turned out to be my wife on occasion. So I would say that there's a provision here.

My advice to the minister, and I'm sure he's listening—Mr. Bradley does listen. He cancelled the section which was discriminating—

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I haven't missed a word, John.

Mr. John O'Toole: —and the parliamentary assistant from Algoma-Manitoulin is here. Here's what you do. Reciprocal agreements: If they have a respected system regime of licensing and testing from whatever country, there should not be discrimination, especially countries where they speak one of our two official languages. I'm not discriminating.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Because, quite frankly, people come from other countries where we have an agreement, and as far as I'm concerned, they should be treated fairly.

Another section here is actually quite good as well. Section 134, which allows for removing vehicles or cargo or debris from a highway, is an important amendment. I agree with this section. It's called incident management. You see now some of the gridlock in the GTA and other areas; there's this lack of responsibility or avoiding liability for incident management. MTO is going to take responsibility for clearing these incidents, whether it's an accident where cargo's been spilled on the road or other reasons, not to have a total tie-up. That section I agree with.

I have looked at the bill and there's another section in here that I think is somewhat troubling, which is the

approaching of emergency vehicles. What they're trying to do here is, first of all, the definition of an ambulance or fire department vehicle and motorized snow vehicle under this section is to be amended to include emergency vehicles as well. This section here is quite interesting as well. I would say that where you have volunteers who participate in certain parts of the province who have warning lights and have flashing lights, they should be exempted, providing they're on a duly certified response to an emergency situation. I would say they should also be fully certified drivers.

I want to put on the record here a couple of things. My riding of Durham is one of the most beautiful ridings in the province of Ontario, and I would invite all members to come to my riding and listen to the constituents. The member from Oshawa and I have worked and represented that area for almost 15 years. We listen, we learn, and we represent the people to the best of our ability.

This is from Trent Angiers and I'm go to read this—zero tolerance for speeding should have a window; there should be a window on zero tolerance. You've heard this a lot.

The parliamentary assistant is here, and I appreciate the work he has done on this. I think the passengers issue has been addressed appropriately, and so I thank the hundreds of thousands of students from Ontario who have participated through us and online in MySpace or whatever other format.

This is from Colin Shafer, who is from my community as well, son of Bob. It's on Bill 126—he's opposed to this bill. This is a young person engaged in the democratic process, and I think it's about the voice of young people. Let's listen to them because they have something to say.

1630

This is quite an interesting one from Amanda Rodger. She says, "I am a college student with my G2 licence, and I am very concerned about the proposed driving law where anyone under 21 can only have one person under 19 at a time. I feel that this is not environmentally friendly because that means that more of us 'dirt poor' students will be forced to purchase cars and purchase more gas (which is way out of a lot of our budgets). The vast majority of us students are under 21 (I myself am only 18) and we rely on carpooling, it is environmentally friendly and it is a cheap way to get to school" when the tuitions are so high in the province of Ontario under Dalton McGuinty, "especially for commuters."

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: There's a bit of ad libbing there, I'll admit that. But it's true. I'm hearing it from all the students. "If you take away our carpooling rights, there will be a lot of students with no way to get to school and there will definitely be more pollution."

"I agree with the old rule where it restricts us from having more than one underage passenger past midnight because it will definitely save a lot of lives. This new law has not been thought through properly"—what a clever

student Amanda is. "A better way to solve this is to limit our passengers when it starts getting dark outside (maybe change it to 6 or 7 p.m.)."

She brings a common sense way of implementation through regulation. She makes a lot of very good sense.

This is from Tom Blake from my riding:

"I read in the Star today, and can see on Facebook, that 110,000 people share my feelings that limiting the number"—thank you very much, Tom, because they have addressed that.

"As a parent of a newborn child, I am quite upset that the province is putting into law ideals that are best taught by parents."

This is nanny state government trying to take over the role of the duly responsible parents. Again, there are some really good, thoughtful—but what's most impressive to me is people taking the time to engage, not about Barack Obama and what he's doing, since that's another country, but about what we're doing here in this province that affects their lives directly. Thank you for participating—even if it's critical of Dalton. I like it better when it's critical of him, obviously.

The new transportation bill doesn't support their children's driving to their youth groups—this is from Mr. and Mrs. John Monster. Their children participate in Guiding and Scouting and outdoor activities, and often there are many young people in the car while they're volunteering in their community.

This one here is a very good one from Tyler Richards: "Thank you very much for responding. I just gained a little more faith in our government that has been lost in the past few months first because of this new legislation and will obviously now because of the new coalition"—he's talking about the coalition in Ottawa, and he's right on that, too. That coalition is dead wrong.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm just trying to respond respectfully to my constituents. Let's not have any giggling on the other side.

The other part is driver's licence changes—and this is from Eileen Gerber. She states:

"I would like to express my concern with the possible new driver's licensing that is being considered. The rules for new drivers should be the same not something different for teens." This is the "being treated equal" argument. "If you are a new driver at 19 it applies but not if you are 20. If you have an immature teen or young adult their chronological age is not going to make them make better choices. If a new driver who is a young parent with, say, two young children in the back seat of the car and the children are crying and acting up, this could be just as much of a distraction as loud music and more than one teenager in a car" for that matter. "We seem to be penalizing all teens. What about the responsible teen who is going to university and college and is offsetting transportation costs by providing transportation to school or home for a fee to other students? How about a 19-year-old who is finished high school and college, is recognized by the law as an adult, has driven without incident

since they were 16, but we are going to apply this possible new licensing because the government sees them as irresponsible. I feel some parents seem to be expecting the government to take on the responsible parenting role when it comes to allowing and monitoring their teenagers when it comes to the privilege of driving.

"Possibly you could share with me the reasoning behind why this rule is important for the government to pass against teenagers."

There's a very responsible and mature response from Eileen Gerber in my riding.

But I think it was all said quite honestly by the most independent authority we could imagine. Here's the book. The government has been called to account. Here's the auditor's report. I first of all thank him for the report. It just shows that they're not perfect. They're far from perfect. This is the biggest one I've seen in 15 years. There's a lot of work to be done and you've run out of money. You've taxed as much as you could. You've spent everything you've received and now you're out of money, and Bob Rae could be your leader because you could solve all problems if you had all my money, or all of anybody's money.

Here's the other part too. I think the Toronto Star, which I said earlier, is actually often referred to outside of the House here as the Liberals' briefing notes—it is, actually. They probably write it and send it to them and they just print it. But this article is from Saturday the 7th and it says, "Would-be Drivers Shop for Easy Road Tests." This tells the whole story, really; it's right here. It starts by saying, "Ontario drivers who take their road test in Brampton fail at nearly five times the rate of drivers in Sault Ste. Marie."

Mr. Michael A. Brown: We're good in Sault Ste. Marie.

Mr. John O'Toole: The parliamentary assistant gets it. The member from Algoma-Manitoulin gets it. They aren't. We're no different. We all want to be treated fairly and equally. Is Brampton being discriminated against? Are they being discriminated against? You're encouraging the young people here to take a flight up to Algoma-Manitoulin and Sault Ste. Marie to get their driver's tests so they can pass because it's easier there.

But this article—I'd encourage the viewers here—lists all the places where it's easy. So if you have a teenage child at home who is going to take a driver's test, they should check the Toronto Star, December 7, page A2, and it will tell you where the easiest spots are, because it's not equal.

What I'm saying here is that we should all be treated equally—young people, old people—and any attempt to discriminate based on age is simply wrong. It's the wrong thing. It's the wrong message. The youth are our future. Let's treat them with a bit of respect and let's listen to them—not just to Eileen Gerber and other students who have written to me responsibly during this provincial debate. I think it's important, and I think it's important that Minister Bradley actually listen.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened again to the member from Durham. He is always entertaining. But the point that I liked best in his entire speech was when he started talking about the testing that's taking place here in Ontario. I referred to this in my own speech, but I think he makes a very valid point, the point being that you're five times more likely to fail your test if you take that test in Brampton or in the Toronto area than if you take it in Sault Ste. Marie. There are other places, of course, that he did not mention. Some of the other places, like Kapuskasing, have an equally lower failing rate. It's not that I'm asking that people fail, but it seems untoward to me that one can pass one's test much more easily in some places in the province than in others. It seems untoward that people are getting their licence, on the other hand, much more easily in those locations than they do in the Toronto area.

I would acknowledge that there are good drivers and bad drivers in both areas, but it would seem that, if we have a system of licensing in Ontario, then it should be an equitable system of licensing. I think he's made the point that it doesn't make much sense that you would be five times more likely to fail in one portion of the province than in another. It seems also unlikely to me that you would pass nine times out of 10 in a place like Sault Ste. Marie and only one out of two in a place like Brampton or Toronto.

So I think the government needs to look at this. The majority of people taking the test for the first time—and it's not exclusive—would be the same people who are being hit by this particular piece of legislation. They would be drivers under the age of 21, first-time drivers who are applying for the test for the first time. It's not exclusive, but they are the majority, and I think the government does need to look at that in committee. I commend the member from Durham.

1640

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I appreciate the comments from the member from Durham, and I look forward to the public hearings on Bill 126. I'm hopeful that all three House leaders will meet and arrange a schedule that makes sure that the people of Ontario are heard on this bill.

The minister, of course, made an announcement this morning that sets aside the provision that during the first year of a G2 licence, you could only have one passenger, I believe, 19 or under, and then it would go up. Anyway, that has been set aside. I am sure my good friend the member from Durham will be responding to those e-mails that he has just been reading from and saying, "The government listened: The government withdrew that provision of Bill 126," and they need not be concerned because that has happened. I'm sure that the member from Durham will be doing that, as all members of this place will be contacting their constituents and saying, "This is going to be removed. You have been heard." That will happen, and I'm sure that my friend the member from

Durham will be doing that, as I'm sure he did when he received those e-mails. Some of them were inaccurate in their immediate premise, and I'm sure before he would have his constituent wax on about how bad or good a particular provision might be, that he would want to see that his constituent had the actual relevant facts. I know my good friend would do that.

So I have a question, and this is questions or comments. What I really want to know from the member from Durham—the question part is: Is he in favour of the zero blood alcohol content for people under the age of 22? That is a provision that is out there. It could be controversial, and I want his view.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I was, of course, impressed with the member from Durham, who spoke eloquently and mentioned the auditor's report. Like him, I don't think that I've seen an auditor's report that is that thick or that comprehensive in my 15 years of being here. Of course, he has made a number of recommendations on commercial vehicle safety and enforcement programs that have been, I guess—

Mr. John O'Toole: Ignored.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Ignored—sadly lacking, let's say; haven't been at the forefront of. They're not doing truck inspections. I think the member from Carleton also mentioned the inspection.

One of the things that happened—when I first got elected in 1995, we began inspecting trucks on a massive level. If you recall in those days, tires were flying off trucks at regular intervals. We started truck inspections and clamped down on the safety of these vehicles. In the first blitzes that we had, we were finding that 30% or 40% of the trucks that were pulled over were out of contention for the regulations that they had to fulfill. When we left office, safety on the roads was pretty good. But, of course, if you don't maintain that, it tends to ebb away. They tend to get a little lax. I think that's maybe what's happening out there now.

So the member brought to the attention of the House some very, very important parts of that auditor's report, especially as it deals with transportation, and that this bill essentially talks about transportation and how young people are going to be introduced to those roads. We want to make sure those roads remain as safe in Ontario as they have been in the past.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: There's no question the member from Durham provided a very erudite kind of review of Bill 126 this afternoon, getting into the details, drilling down into the very important facts. I know he had a very long and distinguished career at General Motors and the member from Durham has always been very concerned about road safety in the province of Ontario.

But I can tell you I chatted with my constituency staff this afternoon in Peterborough. The e-mails are coming in, the phone calls are coming in, and they're thanking

the Minister of Transportation, the Honourable Jim Bradley, for getting rid of that provision that was becoming so problematic in the rural part of my riding of Peterborough. I want to congratulate him. He listened. Youth across Ontario, through various communications means, put forward their comments in a very forthright manner. They clearly said, "This was an offensive provision and you, Minister Bradley and Premier McGuinty, took the time, reviewed our comments, took them into consideration," and that all accumulated this morning with the withdrawal of that particular provision.

In the riding of Peterborough I always like to consult with the cousins of the member from Durham—his first cousin George O'Toole, who's my neighbour on Maniece Avenue, and his other cousin Mike O'Toole—because they're very sensible people and they provide good feedback of what's going on here in the Legislature. They had some concerns about this bill too. So I wanted to tell the member from Durham that I do consult with his family members in Peterborough and they provide very good input to what is going on here.

As I said, I want to congratulate him. He has been at the forefront for a number of issues with regard to road safety, and I know that when it comes time to vote, he will be in support of this very important piece of legislation which will make our roads much safer in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Durham, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, member from Beaches—East York, who mentioned the issue of the testing, and I think it's appropriate that it was in the paper and it was brought here. I hope the minister hears that.

Of course, the critic hearing all of this, really listening intensely, is the member from Algoma—Manitoulin, the parliamentary assistant, Michael Brown. He has committed here that they will have public hearings. I take his word at that. He has always been fairly cogent in his remarks. I just hope they don't prorogue the House, you know, like in Ottawa? The Liberals always like to prorogue. Well, they'll probably prorogue.

The other thing is, I would like to thank the member from Halton: always accurate, always focused, always timely and mostly tells the truth—well, always, I guess.

The member from Peterborough, talking about drilling down: Well, there's a low point where you hit bedrock, and you know that there's no more action necessary, but he did compliment members of my sort of extended family. I should tell him that one of his constituents has moved out on him. Yes, Dan O'Toole has moved to my riding. He knows where he'll get the representation that'll stand up in the face of—but it's closer to where he works, at CTV. He is a relative and he has done the right thing, for sure.

This bill is more serious than that. It's about the government listening and acting, and this part is right, but there's still inherent discrimination in this bill. There needs to be fine-tuning. Our critic, Frank Klees, has been relentless on road safety. His voice and the voice of

Laurie Scott, who's the next speaker, are voices that should be listened to. Laurie Scott, the member from Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes, is the one who authored the speed limiter bill, and that was a compliment to her when the minister adopted her legislation. So she's next to speak, and I'll be here to listen.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? The member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock.

Applause.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Keep clapping; kill the clock. That's good.

It's a pleasure this afternoon to add more comments to Bill 126. I have spoken several times in the Legislature on this bill, not to the length that I'm about to speak this afternoon, but it's certainly been, I say, a very hot topic in all our ridings, maybe more in rural Ontario than in urban Ontario—

Mr. Jeff Leal: It's sizzling.

Ms. Laurie Scott: But it is sizzling, as they're saying from the government benches over there.

I was happy to see the Minister of Transportation today get up and reconsider the most controversial part of the legislation that we see in this bill, and that's in respect to the number of passengers in the car. So I do appreciate that the Minister of Transportation has come forward with that amendment—he'll be changing the legislation—and that our critic for the Ministry of Transportation, Frank Klees, the member from Newmarket—Aurora, stood up at that point and gave him a standing ovation. In the Legislature, we do appreciate the fact that so many young people and parents and people from our ridings did respond, with over 120,000 on Facebook so far that I know of. I have several e-mails, which I'm going to get to in a little bit. But it was incredible, the responses, especially from young people, because we all have our challenges in bringing young people into the political realm and to understand that they need to participate. It's not until they seem to be much older adults that they become more engaged. I don't know if that was the intent of this legislation—probably not to be such a lightning rod for the young people to be against—but it certainly worked and it got them involved. I certainly appreciate that, and all members of the Legislature, I'm sure, are in favour of increasing the safety on our roads, and not to have to hear of the numerous traffic fatalities and accidents that could have been prevented, especially when we get into a bit of a rougher weather scene that we're about to approach in our season.

1650

The member from Newmarket—Aurora, as critic for the Minister of Transportation, has brought forward legislation to crack down and get tough on street racing. This became the root of the government legislation which was passed in this House to make the roads safer and strengthen the laws on the street-racing-related offences that occurred.

I mentioned Facebook and the public consultations. I know that the member from Huron—Bruce mentioned

earlier today, in some of her responses to this legislation, that they would be promising public hearings, letting people—young, old, and including rural Ontarians—have their say about how this piece of legislation affects them. They might have taken the biggest thing out of the legislation, but there are still some comments that people want to make in regard to the legislation. I'm going to be watching closely where these committee meetings are going to be taking place, making sure that the public, especially in rural Ontario—and hopefully educating some young people to come to committee hearings to get their input on how the process works.

I do want to remind the member from Huron—Bruce that it was just a few short months ago that they said that they would be having a lot of public consultations in rural Ontario in regard to pesticide banning, and we didn't really see that happen. I think that we were all here in Toronto, and that was not very convenient for a lot of people in rural Ontario to be consulted in regard to the pesticides ban. So we know that didn't happen, and I think she used some of the terminology—"Let's be naughty as opposed to nice"—so I'm going to watch to make sure that you are nice with these public consultations, and they do get to the places in Ontario that they should be hearing from. I'm just making sure you keep your promise on this one, and not like did you on the pesticide legislation that we brought forward—one of those many bans.

We've been kept busy compiling the list of bans that the Liberal government has brought forward—what are we into, some 30?—bans, bans, bans, bans, bans. Anyway, you don't want me to sing. But I'm hoping it does end soon. Please, I hope the bans do end soon.

Mr. Michael Prue: I want to hear you sing.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Oh no, you don't. I need to protect my colleagues somewhat from my singing voice.

It is the list of bans that go on, and we'd like it to cease. I know that the member from Thornhill is very good on the ban jam, and he's going to speak following me. It's unfortunate that we can't get some more members from the other parties to speak on this bill, but we will carry through and entertain you as much as possible. For those who can still get the legislative channel at home—because they're not on the satellite dish anymore. You didn't ban that. I mean, I thought TVO should actually carry more of the legislative channel. Anyway, I know we'll be working together to bring the Ontario legislative channel back to the satellite receivers. We don't want you to ban that anymore.

The minister, when he started the leadoff debate last week in this—I want to quote him, because I appreciate this comment—said that "every bill that comes before this House deserves significant analysis. So if someone disagrees with a provision in this bill, that doesn't mean that person has any less concern about the safety of young people or other people in vehicles than we have on the government side or I happen to have as Minister of Transportation. I think that's a very bogus and unfair argument when that takes place."

I appreciate that. If we get up in the opposition and make a comment on this particular piece of legislation, it's not because we don't want our roads to be safer. We're making objective comments. So I appreciate the fact that he acknowledged that. We all want our roads to be safer, but there are some pieces of this legislation that just aren't practical, common sense, especially in rural Ontario, which is my riding of Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock.

Further remarks the minister made, and this part is important: "I want to assure members when they comment on the bill that I believe what they're doing is coming from a sense of sincerity and a sense of their judgment on what is found to work best in this field."

I know that we need to convince people that even if we disagree, we don't want to hear comments over there from the government that we don't respect road safety and want safer roads. There are more amendments that need to be made.

I'm going to just comment on some of the types of e-mails that I got in. I didn't go on to Facebook myself, but many of my staff did. We got a lot of reports, especially from reporters that would call in and ask for comment. You can imagine. I think just about every newspaper in my riding wrote about this legislation and how unfair it was, whether it's letters to the editor, the editorials themselves or just interview pieces that the reporters did.

From my area in Fenelon Falls:

"We live on a farm in Fenelon Falls and have three teenagers aged 19, 17 and 15. Public transit is not an option for us." Certainly our roads and bridges are public transportation in rural Ontario.

"Our oldest daughter takes her younger siblings to various 4-H events each month, and this is a real help to my husband and I, since we are actively working or farming. With the new rule of one teenage passenger per vehicle"—how it would impact their life, their situation? She and her husband would have to commit to driving more and taking time away from working on the farm.

Also from a resident in the city of Kawartha Lakes who's lived there his entire life, currently 19, affected by the news: "The worst part of this law is that G2 drivers are not allowed to have more than one person under the age of 19 in the car with them at any time. I'm not quite sure why or how this part was thought up, but someone did not think it through. Is there not a climate crisis right now?"

I got that a ton from the young people who asked, "What's the impact on our environment if we can't carpool, we can't have one dedicated driver? How can we get to and from schools, events, 4-Hs, our clubs, etc.?" But also the impact on the environment.

He says, "This law not only inhibits the things I would normally do. I now cannot go on road trips unless I only bring one friend. I now cannot carpool. I can't volunteer to be the designated driver. I realize that the law was put in place in order to try and save lives, but it clearly was not thought through."

In another e-mail from the Kawartha Lakes area of my riding: "I agree with people who say driving is a privil-

ege. Since it's a privilege, shouldn't we let irresponsible people pay for their mistakes? Why should the young drivers who drive responsibly be punished for others' mistakes?" No question.

The example that was used so much was that a young person of that age over in Afghanistan can drive a tank, can carry a gun, protect our country, fight for the freedom of people in other countries, yet they could come home and they couldn't drive their friends to a party. That was used over and over again.

I have to say that the majority, a big majority of the young people I meet, are truly responsible people. In rural Ontario, you have to be responsible, I think, at a younger age than a lot of kids in urban Ontario. That's mainly due to our lifestyles and the fact that they start working a lot earlier, especially if they come from an agriculture background. They're on the farms, they're helping their parents and their family out from very young ages. They are really responsible. Education goes on, and MADD does a good job going to schools, too. I have a good local chapter in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. There's a lot of education out there for young people, to keep them safe and just to make them aware of the responsibility you have when you're driving. A car can be a weapon, and it is to be taken seriously.

Another comment says, "Instead of the three of us driving to the movies in one vehicle, we would then have take two vehicles, doubling the traffic and greenhouse emissions involved in the journey. Ironically, this also puts two young drivers behind the wheel instead of one."

I got a good comment, if I can find the e-mail here, from—I didn't ask him if I could use his name, but I'm sure he will be okay with it because he ran federally for the NDP in the riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, and that's Stephen Yardy.

1700

Mr. Michael Prue: He had signs up everywhere.

Ms. Laurie Scott: He was, I have to say, a very good young candidate. The great story of the campaign was that the current MP for the Conservatives, Barry Devolin, actually handed Stephen Yardy his graduation diploma while the campaign was going on. And he's still actively engaged. He was a good young candidate. People wanted him to run again so, hopefully, they are grooming him to run again.

But he says in his e-mail he is opposed "to certain aspects of the new young drivers law that was introduced" in the "Legislature on Tuesday, November 18th ... I respect the idea of zero tolerance. I strongly oppose the new proposed restrictions to drivers under the age of 19 who currently hold a valid G2 licence; these restrictions would forbid any driver under the age of 19, holder of a G2 licence for less than a year, to have more than one passenger in the vehicle at any given time of the day.

"This is no more than a feel-good measure to make it look like the McGuinty government is doing something, while attacking the young people of Ontario. I do support

the current restriction on young drivers where they currently cannot have more than one person under the age of 19 in their vehicle between 12 a.m. and 5 a.m. for the first three months of having a valid G2 licence.

"The measures as they stand in this bill would restrict students from carpooling and ... general travelling in large groups during the day. I don't know about Mr. McGuinty or the Minister of Transportation, Mr. Bradley, but I know of no young person who drinks at 10 in the morning.

"The government should stop its attack on the young people of this province and start looking at real measures of fighting drinking and driving.

"In solidarity,

"Stephen Yardy

"Lindsay, Ontario"

That's great, Stephen; you're still engaged. I believe he is attending Fleming College in Lindsay, which is a great college. We have a super campus there, Frost Campus, that he attends. Kudos to him for running in the election and kudos to him for staying involved in politics and for sending us his opinions on legislation that is brought forward.

There has been a lot of talk about age discrimination and some of the penalties that are involved. I know that my colleague from Carleton-Mississippi Mills commented on the stiff penalties. If you go over 10 kilometres an hour, then your licence can be gone for 30 days. I mean, we're all human here.

There has been some conversation in the Legislature today too about the speed limits in Ontario and how slower drivers could actually encourage—more accidents can occur. So I think we have to look at all of this, but that is a really, really strict fine. I don't think we're all complete angels here. Taking a driver's licence away from them for a month so they can't go to their clubs, the 4-H clubs or different clubs they belong to—they can't get to school; they can't get to their jobs; they can lose their jobs. I think a little bit of practicality and common sense has to come into play here. That's a pretty stiff penalty for going more than 10 kilometres over the speed limit.

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Anyway, it's a strict penalty for the young people. I think there's a lot of this, with age and discrimination.

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Okay, well, the member is going to have his two-minute hit, so he can certainly bring that up.

Some headlines from my local press—from Catherine Whitnall from Kawartha Lakes This Week: "Province's Proposed Young Driver Legislation is Ageism in Action." She's got a young 16-year-old son and she's avoided taking him to write his G1. It's not that she doesn't believe he's "responsible enough. In fact, I have greater confidence in his skill behind the wheel than I do for my own ... mother. I just don't want to share my car," she says. She goes on: "Under current law, G1 and G2 drivers must maintain a zero blood-alcohol level. An

amendment" that "would shift this requirement to all drivers up to age 21.

"These changes should be across the board. Age doesn't dictate one's driving ability. Neither should legislation." That's from Kawartha Lakes This Week.

From the Haliburton Echo, Martha Perkins, the headline is "Teen Drivers See Red Over Passenger Limit."

Interjection: Oh, they did?

Ms. Laurie Scott: They did. They see red up in Haliburton when they get some of their freedoms taken away.

It says that "although drinking under the age of 19 is illegal, it's 'inevitable' that teens are going to break that rule. However, they've heard the message about designated drivers loud and clear and are usually careful about following that policy. A designated driver, however, will not want to have to drive passengers home one at a time. There won't be enough designated drivers to go around."

Those are just some of the comments from a few of the newspaper articles, and I guess I'd better cover all the bases here.

From the Post, it says: "It shows that in the Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock area, it's not the young drivers who are the worst offenders for the drinking and driving. Instead, the average age of those charged is 39. Kawartha Lakes OPP records show that 12 people age 21 and under have been charged with Criminal Code drinking-and-driving-related offences since January 1 of this year."

So again there is certainly some questionable age discrimination in some of it. I'm running out of time, and I wanted to bring in the fact—and I will show one—about a person from my riding in Woodview but very close to the member from Peterborough's riding. They write in. It says:

"Please add my name to the list of people who applaud the changes regarding zero tolerance...."

"Then add my name to the long list opposing the unfair proposal to limit first-time drivers to one teenage passenger. It is a discriminating proposal.

"I live in a rural area with absolutely no bus service." I mean, it's just not feasible in our area. "A taxi ride is \$60 each way from my home (Woodview area) to Lakefield. Not too practical for young people in our area who want to attend school functions after the school buses leave. Of course, the same applies to northern kids who travel long distances to their schools and other activities as well. It would appear that it would work for city kids with many options for travel in their area. Perhaps the entire Legislature needs reminding that rural members of the voting public tire of being discriminated against with legislation which makes sense in urban areas but not in rural." Hear, hear, to that. "The whole population in this large province do not have the same options available to Toronto and other big city centres.

"I want you to know that my children are well past the age affected by this proposal. I have no personal reason to oppose this bad proposal."

That's from the Woodview area in my riding saying it all very much—McGuinty Liberal government, urban

agenda, discriminating against rural Ontario—and that's certainly in the long list of bans that we have. So there's some direct discrimination to young people in this.

I think young people do take it as a privilege and drive very seriously. They take their education, their improvement courses, and they do their part to be safe and responsible young citizens. Certainly our party feels sad when we hear the tragic stories on the roads, but there are a lot of responsible young people out there who don't deserve to be discriminated against in the way parts of this legislation will affect them.

I'm looking forward to the committee hearings that are going out across the province, especially the ones in rural Ontario, and maybe the government will hear some more good advice that they can take under their wing.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise to comment on the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, who I think made a number of very good points. Just to reiterate some of them and to prove that I was listening throughout, she talked about Stephen Yardy, and indeed he is an amazing young man. I was absolutely impressed with his ability, fresh out of high school, to take on the daunting task of running for federal office. He did an amazing job, and I think he is someone that other young people might like to emulate: someone who is willing to go out there to take on a public process, to step right into the limelight and do the best job he could. What he had to say, which was quoted in the body of the letter, I think shows a level of maturity and understanding that is very common, that is not rare, among young people.

Second, she talked about the penalties, and it is absolutely correct: The penalties that are meted out to new drivers, particularly young drivers, will be very different from the penalty that would be meted out to a member of this Legislature. It's not because we have privilege; it's because we are older and have been driving longer. In fact, if one goes 15 kilometres over the limit, and I do recognize the parliamentary assistant correcting that earlier, then one would be eligible for demerit points. If I drove 15 kilometres over the limit, I would get a fine in the \$25, \$30 or \$40 range and I would get a demerit point. But a young person, under this act, will suffer much more. Not only will it be the loss of licence for 30 days, but it will be the inherent increase in the insurance rates, much more so than me. They are already onerous and they are already usurious, and I'm saying that it's simply not fair.

The last point was about those who drink and drive. In her constituency the average age was 39; I believe that's what she said. In fact, only 20 or so people under the age of 21 were arrested in her constituency, according to the OPP, in that period. So I think we need to bear that in mind when we're looking at this legislation. I look forward to the public hearings, where all of this and more will come to light.

1710

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I appreciate the comments from my friend from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

The first issue I want to deal with is the public hearings. I am hopeful that the House leaders of all three political parties will get together and decide on public hearings that will be heard across the province and will be available to all people. Like most members, I am very encouraged by the engagement, particularly of young people, in this exercise that has surrounded Bill 126. I am sure that they would want to know that the minister today recognized their concern about passengers being carried by G2 drivers during the first year of the G2 regime, where they could carry only one other person 19 or under. That has been eliminated from the bill. So I'm sure she will be sending e-mails to all of those people who have e-mailed her to let them know that they have been successful in bringing that to the government's attention and having the government respond in a favourable way to their supplications.

I want to quickly ask the member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock if she's in favour of the blood-alcohol content being zero for those aged 21 or under in this legislation. Statistics show that fatalities are significantly higher for those drivers 19, 20 and 21 and the alcohol content is a strong factor in those fatalities. I'm looking forward to her response on that particular issue.

This is a broad bill that covers a wide range of elements, and I'm sure we'll have a chance to talk about more of them later.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I'm looking forward to responding to the member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, but the member for Algoma-Manitoulin raised a little bit of concern. Previously, I believe, the member for Durham stated that we had a commitment for the hearings, and I just heard that there was not a commitment for those hearings. At the very least, we should be having hearings in Kagawong or at least Mindemoya. He would know that to which I refer.

He constantly mentions this zero blood-alcohol-content issue, and I think the real question is, is there anybody out there who does not support that? It's not just the age group that's targeted, but what about all drivers? If you ask those same individuals about all drivers in that sense, I think you're going to get—society is now completely turned around—the same response.

I've made my decision. I don't drink. I'm always the designated driver, and I never understand what they're laughing at or making fun about, and it's kind of annoying. But you make those decisions. I think part of it is that society has matured to that point, but we have to look at some of the restrictions on teenage youth as a whole. Once upon a time we used to say that a 19-year-old man shot—a 19-year-old boy; we've just changed the age discrimination. As mentioned, we've now moved it up to 22 for these individuals.

I see society as being very responsible and very active, but I see where we're clamping down and we're

tightening the grip on individuals and youth in society and making restrictions so strong that the options they have are becoming more and more limited. Quite frankly, I coach kids' hockey, and on a regular basis I see these poor kids stuck on the computer and everybody is mad because they're playing on the computer. What the heck else do they get to do? They can't drive a boat now, and let's not have them on an ATV or let's not have them do this and that and everything else in society. The tighter we squeeze our grip on youth, the more they're going to slip through our fingers. That's one of the problems that we're having. We need to make sure that we raise kids—and it's not so much that we're going to pass laws; it's what's going to happen within the families and the core of our society, in those core areas, whether it's the faith community or other aspects that are going to make those changes and make society stronger.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have a moment to add some comments to the speech by the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. Of course, Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock is just east of the riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka.

Speaking to Bill 126, the member talked about the propensity of this government to bring in bans, and she specifically mentioned the pesticides ban. I know that I had the Landscape Ontario folks meeting with me last week to point out how so often, as has been the case with this government's bans, they're not based on science. In the case of the pesticides ban, it's based on politics or which particular interest group—in this case, some very specific environmental groups—has a direct line into the Premier's office to make requests that aren't based on science.

So there are pesticides that are on the reduced risk list for Health Canada, which means they've had extensive testing done, and yet the province is banning these substances even though none of the municipalities that have specific bans to do with pesticides have banned any of these particular products. I think that not until we get the inevitable grub infestations that will happen because we aren't using these products, and the people affected are calling their Liberal MPPs to complain about this, will we get some reason happening here. But right now this government has brought in a record number of bans, and unfortunately they're so often based on political science.

This afternoon, of course, we're talking about Bill 126. I do support some aspects of the bill: the changes to do with the ignition interlock devices being one of them, and making it easier to set up reciprocal agreements with other states and jurisdictions is another positive aspect of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock has up to two minutes to respond.

Ms. Laurie Scott: As I said, I was pleased to have the opportunity to speak at length on Bill 126, the Road

Safety Act, this afternoon, and I appreciate the comments by my colleagues from Beaches–East York, Algoma–Manitoulin, Oshawa and Parry Sound–Muskoka.

The theme kept coming up, and I want to read from one more newspaper, the Brock Citizen, because I'm trying to cover most of them. Their headline is, "Proposed Laws for Young Drivers Irrational." In this article, the lady says, "The government is simply trying to punish young drivers before they even get a start, and that's wrong. How are we ever considered young adults if the choices we make are continually being limited by laws?" She goes on and says, "In many cases, these irresponsible teens not only have friends in the vehicle but they have consumed alcohol and are driving at outrageous speeds. Those are the teens who should be punished, not the rest of us. The laws that are currently in place make it impossible for young drivers to get a start." She mentions what I'm sure we all hear about: "Especially males are paying outrageous prices for insurance before we even get behind the wheel. Shouldn't we at least get one chance? It's a person's choice if they decide to drive irresponsibly, and I believe that those are the people who should be penalized, not the innocent drivers."

Society has no tolerance for drinking and driving now. I mentioned MADD, but I do mention a lot of the driver education programs that go on.

The question about this legislation that was brought up many times in the newspapers was the knee-jerk reaction. It wasn't thought out. As the member from Beaches–East York said, why was the passenger thing in the legislation at all to start with? Why didn't we think this out before we brought it in? We've antagonized a lot of people. Getting young people involved is good, but things could have been thought out a lot better.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Six and a half hours of debate on this bill having taken place, pursuant to standing order 47(c), the debate is deemed to be adjourned.

Mr. Norm Miller: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The House leaders had an agreement that the government would keep this debate going. I would hope that a member of the government will stand up and keep this debate going this afternoon so it can continue tomorrow.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this. I, of course, was not the one at House leaders' debate, but I do understand that there was a discussion with House leaders and there appears to be an agreement to keep the debate going until 6 o'clock. So, in light of that, I'm happy to do whatever needs to be done to facilitate the pursuit of a debate for the rest of the afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is the Attorney General, then, specifically saying that pursuant to standing order 47(c) the debate should continue?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Yes, until 6 o'clock, I understand.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I rise to add my voice to those discussing Bill 126, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and to make consequential amendments to two amending acts. That's kind of an interesting title given that most people, especially young people, are just talking about a bill that pertains to drinking and driving and age. That's primarily what I want to discuss today, but I also want to, in my opening remarks, make reference to a couple of things.

One is, this is an interesting bill because it's the first time that the government of the day has discovered what social networking means. It didn't take very long, when debate opened on Bill 126, for Premier McGuinty to get wind of the fact that there were, oh, then about 100,000, now, as I understand it, about 150,000 people on a Facebook site, all of them pretty well being young people, all of them opposed to what the government was trying to do. Interestingly, in reaction to that, the Premier came out and said, "We hear you loud and clear. We think we'll be able to do something on this."

Following that, sitting here and participating in the debate or at least watching the debate take place, noticing the presence of the transport minister for much of the beginning of the debate itself, taking copious notes—and I appreciate the fact that he was. It's not often that you see ministerial presence in this House during the long hours of debate and, very particularly, responding in what seemed like a favourable way to our repeated requests for hearings and for the fact that there seemed to be a number of inequities in this bill.

I can't support the bill as it stands because many of its proposed changes are discriminatory. They negate the need and requirement for personal responsibility and, all in all, I do not believe that they would be effective in the prevention of injuries and fatalities that result from irresponsible driving.

The bill flows, obviously, from one or two very tragic accidents that would, frankly, never have been prevented had legislation like this been in force. If, indeed, the bill flows from those, one has to ask the question, "Why is it there?"

In Ontario, as in the rest of Canada, we have lost many lives—young lives, old lives—to drunk-driving accidents. That in and of itself is tragic, but it is not particularly related to age. These are all needless and preventable tragedies; however, my position is that Bill 126 will not be successful in preventing those tragedies but will instead put an unfair burden on those who have committed no crime. I believe that young and old people do make mistakes, and you can never legislate mistakes away. Laws are made; laws are broken. Sometimes when the law is broken the perpetrator can walk away, having learned his or her lesson from the mistake that's been made. Those are the good ones. Other times those mistakes turn into tragedies and they leave behind grieving families and friends.

When I meet a family who's experienced this, I never, ever say, "I can only imagine what you must feel," because I can't imagine what they feel, and may not

family ever have to deal with it. Any family that has experienced a tragedy like this, however, is a family that I grieve for. I can offer no solace. Certainly, legislation like this can do no more than that. Governments cannot legislate against all mistakes, and my proposition is that government stop trying. The role of individual responsibility cannot be underestimated when we talk about making our roads safer. This has to be about education. It can't be about legislation. Drinking is a privilege that is granted to adults by society, and driving is a similarly granted privilege of adulthood. Many privileges are out there, not rights.

As I've mentioned in this Legislature before, one of the things I choose to do in my spare time is fly an airplane. That is a very large privilege with a huge educational curve. It relates to age, regulations and an ability to communicate in a particular way. There is the whole element of controlled flight, that is, how you operate the controls of an airplane. Any little motion made out of step or out of time, and you and your passengers are in a lot of trouble. Airmanship is the word that we use to describe that. If I add one factor to that, and that is even—in the case of flying—one drink, because alcohol's effects are magnified by altitude, I and my passengers can be in an awful lot of trouble very fast. Isn't it interesting that you can fly a plane, you can obtain that licence, at age 16? The Speaker himself is a pilot, as I've just been informed. So are many members of this Legislature.

So the people who are pilots know those laws. Drinking and driving require maturity and responsibility, things explicitly stated in existing legislation. At 18, the law says that we are, to all intents and purposes, adults. One little exception: You can't drink until 19. But you can fly. You can get married. You can join the army. You can die for your country, and sadly, we recorded the deaths of three Canadians today coming back down the Highway of Heroes. I don't know their ages, but some of those young men and women have been down below the age limit that this bill looks at to enforce new regulations pertaining to driving that, I contend, are discriminatory.

My position is that you're either qualified to be a driver or you're not qualified to be a driver. You either earned that privilege by proving your skills in tests designed to put those skills on trial or you have failed. Our young people become full adults in the eyes of the law at 19. By then they are able to, as I've mentioned, vote, a right they acquire at 18. They are able to enlist in the army. They are able to get married. And, yes, they are able to buy and consume alcohol because society has conferred these rights on them as adults.

With Bill 126, Premier McGuinty says that while all that may be true, they are not responsible enough or mature enough, up to and including age 21, to be considered as adults when it comes to driving. Now, call me thick-headed or wrong-minded, but I just don't get it. At this point I've got to say that our party, in having considered this bill on the question of age 21, will be putting forward an amendment to remove the reference to age 21

and replace it with "novice driver," which would be defined in consultation with the opposition and based on public input.

Again, I refer back to the presence of the Minister of Transportation, who seemed quite agreeable when the initial speakers on this bill talked about hearings, and very particularly hearings that would travel around the province and get input from interested stakeholders right down to the individual drivers: the kids who have to drive 20 miles just to get to hockey practice and are necessarily, because they're in rural environments, bound to take additional passengers. Yes, I know that has been addressed in part in question period this morning. Also, the automatic suspension for speeding, regardless of speeding conviction: We couldn't support that. So a couple of things that I wanted to get on record there.

In my opinion, there are many different young adults. Some are thinking about global politics. We all know some of them. They want to do their part to improve the world, and indeed are considering doing things like joining the army. They're willing to die for their country. Others are consumed by keg parties and batting cages. That's a rather interesting juxtaposition, because I can show you 45-year-olds just like that. You don't have to limit that to age 21. I've met 21-year-olds that I wouldn't trust with a remote-controlled car, and I've also met 15-year-olds whose maturity and sense of responsibility could rival that of many a full-grown adult.

1730

Speaking about flying, come and see some of the people out at Buttonville airport enrolled in the flight program at Seneca College—quite amazing young people with incredible discipline, because that's what it takes to get through a program like that and to pass it. These kids are flying simulators that are a precise replica—for example, a Canadair regional jet—and, to them, they're in the air. Indeed, they should be because ultimately they will be. That's the kind of young adult who taught me to fly when I originally embarked on that enterprise, on that avocation. It was a 20-year-old young woman, who had completed all of her appropriate diplomas and degrees and was perfectly capable of teaching an old guy like me to take the controls and do it properly. So there are kids like that. Most kids are like that, yet the McGuinty Liberals are trying to group all of them together and play parent to each and every one, and you just can't do that. They're trying to punish the many for the errors of the few, and burden responsible young people with additional requirements, only because they fall within a certain age bracket.

In this country, the only reason for you to lose the privileges of adulthood is committing an act that proves that you're not capable of handling the responsibilities of an adult. Check out our jails. Those folks aren't kids, and there are too many of them.

One of the fundamentals in Canada is that every adult is treated equally under the law. That's worth saying again: Every adult is treated equally under the law. So why are we going to make an exception here? When it

comes to driving, one law should apply to all new drivers. It's not about age, and any driver, young or old, who is found unable, incapable of taking on all of the responsibility of driving, should not be permitted to have a driver's licence.

One of my constituents is a 25-year-old woman, who would not be affected by the changes proposed by this bill. She wrote to me and said that she disagrees with the provisions of Bill 126 that differentiate between drivers based on age. If I may quote from that e-mail, she says, "I think it is incorrect to lump all people in the same category, just as it would be wrong to lump all men into one category." She goes on: "Statistically, you are more likely to speed or cause an accident" than she is. "Does that mean that there should be a separate set of laws for male drivers," because they're differentiated from female drivers?

I think the answer is obvious; nobody is trying to do that. But it is a valid question. Insurance companies differentiate. They apply actuarial tables to rates, and charge for insurance. Licensing authorities simply assess whether or not you can pass a test and are therefore capable. The age demarcation is not indicative of anything but a number. So a new driver aged 30 is advantaged under this legislation for no particular reason. A driver who has been at it for a couple of years, who happens to be age 21, is disadvantaged—again, for no particular reason.

Another constituent who called my office argued that the proposed restrictions regarding alcohol limits and passenger limits are setting up young people for failure. The reality is that we already have legislation that makes it illegal to drink and drive, whether you are 19, 20 or 65. If 0.08 in my blood isn't going to make me any worse behind the wheel, why would it be particularly more detrimental to somebody under the age of 22? And the answer is, of course, that it wouldn't.

There are some interesting little elements to this law. I'd like to read one from section 48 of the law:

"Where a young driver has been brought to a stop by a police officer under the authority of this act and has provided a sample of breath under section 48 which, on analysis registers 'Pass' or otherwise indicates that the young driver has no alcohol in his or her body, but the police officer reasonably suspects that the young driver has alcohol in his or her body, the police officer may, for the purposes of determining the concentration of alcohol in the young driver's blood, demand that the young driver provide within a reasonable time such a sample of breath as, in the opinion of the police officer, is necessary to enable a proper analysis of the breath to be made by means of...."

Does this or does it not open the door to abuse of young people over older people by police officers? I say, the way it's written, it does. That, again, is another reason why our party would like to see a full discussion of this, not just in Toronto, not just in Thunder Bay, but at points around the province: so that the appropriate people can be heard and the appropriate modifications made.

In fact, if a person under 22 can be affected by 0.08, then so can all the rest of us, and the lower restrictions should apply to all. I know what you're thinking, especially those of you listening out there: This sounds like MADD—and there's nothing wrong with the group MADD. But so far, 0.08 seems to be serving us well.

I say there are a lot of other factors. An example would be the size of the individual and their ability to consume. Let's suppose that you've got a couple of young people who are less experienced with alcohol, which is what this bill seems to presuppose, and one is saying, "You know, I can have two drinks and I'm still under 0.08," but the guy doing the talking is 200 pounds and the person who is doing the listening is 100 pounds. Two drinks in these two people have differing effects. So I have to ask the question, can we foresee a limitation based on body mass index? Let's hope not.

If a person shouldn't be driving after consuming one glass of wine, then their age doesn't matter. They are or they are not able. This is not arbitrary. The point isn't to graduate people but to graduate licences. Do we really think that a 21-year-old planning to drink and drive under the current restrictions would all of a sudden change his or her mind just because now Premier McGuinty says you're not allowed to have any alcohol at all in the bloodstream if you're under 22? I think the answer is obvious, and it's no.

We have seen too many traffic fatalities involving young people where laws were broken—laws on alcohol abuse, laws on speeding—so the question is begged, will new laws address that? "Well, they've passed a new law," young person X says, "so now I can't do that anymore." I don't think so. That doesn't just go for young people; it goes for anyone who is contemplating drinking and driving. Drinking and driving and speeding is a lethal combination, regardless of the age.

So, again I say, either we're dealing with adults or we are not. If the thought of getting hurt, hurting others and having licences suspended or taken away isn't going to prevent drivers from drinking and driving, then "Father Knows Best" McGuinty's age restrictions aren't going to address the issue. I could go for more stringent testing across the board, perhaps; more RIDE stations, perhaps; more education so that people understand what they're doing when they imbibe, but not new redundant laws that are discriminatory against one group and not against another group.

What is really needed is the education component: the realization that there are serious consequences to breaking the law and the certainty that, yes, those who do break it will be caught and will be punished. So I would urge the government to focus on investing in enforcement and in having stringent consequences for those drivers who exhibit dangerous tendencies. Passing a law is easy and it is cost-free; policing is a real deterrent, but it is expensive.

I don't want expediency to trump real solutions. I support efforts to ensure that getting a driver's licence entails tests that are challenging and that truly test a new driver's skills on the road. Protecting us from each other

works for me, as this House knows; trying to legislate protection of me from myself is just plain dumb. But I also support knowing the difference between speeding and racing, for example; between speeding 10 kilometres per hour over the limit on a highway and 10 kilometres per hour over the limit on a side street with school-children walking home. I strongly believe that punishments should reflect crimes—not be lumped into the same category.

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Let's not forget the role of the parents, in the moment I have left, who, above all else, teach by example and have the tools that are absent from the arsenals of various governments. A constituent whose son is a teen but has a G licence says in her letter to me that "my son knows full well that if drinking, driving, tickets, unsafe habits become issues, I am simply going to sell the car." That's good parenting and, again, not something that anyone can legislate. Parents are still our best bet at making our roads safer, so let's leave them with the opportunity to make a decision on whether their child is ready to take the car keys.

In closing, let me say that I was pleased to hear in question period today that the Minister of Transportation is planning to drop the provisions of the bill that speak to passenger limits and time limits for drivers under age 22. This is an issue that many of my constituents have written to me about, with every single one saying that it was a misguided and self-destructive proposition.

I look forward to comments from members, and thank you today, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently again to the member for Thornhill. He gave a very impassioned, eloquent and I think balanced and researched speech. He talked about the rights of people, the privileges of people, the rights and privileges of parents, as well as of young people, and the difficulty or near impossibility of attempting to legislate bad behaviour. What he didn't say, but I think he inferred, was that it's very difficult to legislate against people who are intent upon breaking the law, and it doesn't matter whether it's this new law or the laws that are extant at this time.

People who break the law often go out with the mistaken belief that they will not be caught. It's part of the reason that they do it; it doesn't matter whether it's drinking and driving or speeding, or the Highway Traffic Act, or whether it's a law under the Criminal Code. It is, in fact, a mistaken belief of many people that they're not going to get caught, which is why they take the opportunity or the chance. Unfortunately, all too many of them are caught and all too many of them suffer the consequences, and others suffer the consequences of their actions.

I commend the member for Thornhill because he put eloquently and in a nutshell, in about 20 minutes, what I think many people out there are thinking. Although there is some support for this bill, there are also people

wondering, quite rationally and reasonably, what this bill is going to accomplish in terms of what is already out there. What is going to be accomplished when you cannot already drink and drive? What is going to be accomplished when you cannot speed in this province without getting a ticket or losing your licence? What is going to be accomplished by all of this? I wait impatiently for the community results and what people have to say when they come before committee. I commend the member for Thornhill for what he had to say today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I first want to say to the member for Thornhill that I agree with him. Driving is a privilege. It isn't a right, it is a privilege, and I would bring to his attention some of the statistics that I think people need to understand.

Drinking and driving is still a factor in one quarter of all road fatalities. In the 10 years to 2005 inclusive, 233 drivers aged under 22 were killed in drinking-and-driving collisions. Drinking drivers aged 19, 20 and 21 have the highest rates of involvement in both fatal collisions and collisions overall. Their involvement rate in fatal and injury collisions is 28% higher than drivers aged 22 through 24. In 2005 alone, collisions that involved drinking drivers aged 19 to 21 resulted in 31 fatalities and 573 injuries. All US states now have zero blood-alcohol-content laws for drivers up to age 21, and this is cited by them as one of the single most important reasons for a drop in young driver collisions. Zero BAC already works for novice drivers in the graduated licensing system. In the four years following the introduction of a zero blood-alcohol-content requirement for G1 and G2 drivers in 1994, the fatal injury and injury collision rate involving the youngest drivers, aged 16 and 17, fell by 76% and 53% respectively.

I say to the member, we need to make our roads safer, and this is one way—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions or comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I was about to say that probably we have just witnessed, or listened to and heard, one of the most powerful speakers. The member for Thornhill gave a very cogent argument for his position, and I think the other members, including the parliamentary assistant, are stymied on how to respond.

He's pointed out several key things. The issue that he dwelt on is the driver testing, if I'm not mistaken. It was one of the sections of the bill that a lot of people, and probably members here in the House, have not read. In fact, I could easily slip to that section of the bill because he pointed it out to me earlier on in our conversations.

I think it's important that we make sure that people's rights are respected. There is a provision in this bill that there's a discretionary component when the police intervene—someone who has been stopped under some suspicion; inappropriate behaviour while driving—and they can just require them to have a breathalyser test, which I think is important at this time of year—the RIDE programs. But he looks at the individual's rights and

that's where there's a bridge; there's a necessary balance here of individual rights and collective societal rights.

I think any person who is confused would say, "If you're under 21, or 21 and under, there are two standards in this bill." This is an important distinction. We're right down into the bone and marrow of the argument that we're trying to address here. It's about individual rights and collective rights and responsibility, and the rights of police officers to intervene.

If we were to listen to the member for Thornhill, we would be wiser, and the minister would be wise to listen to the wise counsel, the comments from the member for Thornhill. At the end of the day, we agree that safety on our highways—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I appreciate the input from the member for Thornhill. I think he makes some thoughtful comments, and I do respect that.

In terms of perspective, if you look back historically at the debates that have taken place in this Legislature and other Legislatures, you'll see it's a recurring theme. When the seat belt legislation was discussed and debated, there were so many legal challenges. So many people said, "You can't infringe on a person's right to drive in a car, and strap them in. They're going to get hurt." There was so much opposition to seat belts. Who would now think of removing seat belt legislation? In the graduated licence debate people said, "You know, you just can't discriminate against young people. They should have a licence. A licence is a licence." That was opposed. Limits on speed on our highways: There are so many people who think, "Let's do like they do in Germany with the autobahn. Let them drive at any speed limit at all." But there is a very large majority of people who believe that it's the role of society to try to protect people and protect society as a whole.

The Tories, the Conservatives, called protecting people's lives on highways things associated with nannies. It's just ludicrous that they would do this.

In the state of Florida, Governor Jeb Bush removed the helmet laws, so now they drive around on motorcycles without helmets in the state of Florida. Can you imagine the horrendous accidents that occur if you drive a motorcycle without a helmet? Child safety seats: There were many people who said, "You can't force my toddler child into a seat." I know my own children, if I ever dared put my grandchildren in the car without seats, would just basically refuse that, whereas we used to drive without them. So let's think of safety first.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Thornhill, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Kind of from the last to first, I'd like to respond a little bit to what was just said by the member for Eglinton—Lawrence, who mentioned a couple of examples of things that we have legislated that tend to protect us from ourselves. He's used the word "nanny-statism", and that's a word that I use often in debate, but not today.

Seat belts are a reasonable idea because they protect people in a car from flying out of the car; it's not us from ourselves. So it's kind of apples and oranges when you mix that with what we're talking about today. We're talking today about a law that is discriminatory against one particular group of our society. I could buy into a law like this if we talked about novice drivers, not of a particular group of drivers categorized by age. I think that's a great distinction.

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In terms of other comments that were made, the member from Beaches—East York—and I thank him very much for coming back to me on this—agrees that you can't legislate against lawbreakers, and that was the main thrust of what I wanted to say. Legislating against people who are going to break the law never matters. You can enact all the laws you want. We discussed in the springtime a law that I have often recalled in debate here that had to do with smoking in a car where there was somebody under 16 years of age present—probably a reasonable idea, but since there's nobody around to enforce it, it was making a law for the sake of making a law.

To the member from Algoma—Manitoulin, thank you very much for the statistics. The statistics very particularly on zero blood-alcohol content were interesting, and again they may well be appropriate for novice drivers, but they are not appropriate for a particular age group. So it's all discussable, it's all negotiable, but that's why we're calling for extensive hearings before this bill becomes law.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: This government, of course, is going crazy on bans. They're socially engineering the province of Ontario, and Bill 126 is another step along that path. By my count, there have been over 30 different bills introduced by this government banning various aspects of our lives: the ban on cell phones, which was from my friend from Durham, banning teen drivers, banning single-use water bottles—that one didn't go through, thank goodness—a ban on expiry dates of gift cards. Bill 126 is a further ban.

Interjection.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Well, the ban on retail gift cards doesn't really work. It wasn't thought through clearly enough, doesn't really work. If I have a gift certificate for a service, it expires, and legally so. If I have a gift certificate for a dollar amount, it doesn't expire. So people think they have a gift certificate that doesn't expire. Surprise, it does expire unless it's for a specific dollar value. Bill 126, which I'm speaking to, Mr. Speaker, continues that process.

There was a ban on sushi which didn't go through. There's a ban on used-oil heating that's currently being discussed. There's a ban on the sale of incandescent light bulbs which doesn't take effect until 2012, but it's going to force us into using fluorescent light bulbs, which are laced with mercury, which could be very damaging to our health.

There's a ban on smoking in private apartment buildings. There was an infringement on your civil rights—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Halton—

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Bill 126, the bill I'm speaking to—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Halton, yes. I just did hear "126," but I hadn't heard it much before. Please speak to the bill.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Bill 126, which I'm speaking to, continues that ban such as we had on pit bulls. Bill 126 was—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Halton, you're either going to speak to Bill 126 or we're going to move on.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'm speaking to Bill 126.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): No, you aren't, and I'm really not going to argue with you about it.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'm not debating—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): You'll get to Bill 126 quickly.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The Speaker is not being entirely objective in this matter, but I'm not going to debate with him.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Halton, I'm just about to move on. Please speak to Bill 126.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Mr. Speaker, the minister announced in the House today an amendment to the bill, that one part of the bill would be withdrawn, and that's perhaps a good start, but there are other parts of this bill which also need to be withdrawn.

The automatic suspension for speeding: That is one that infringes entirely on the rights of people who are in a particular age group in this province. The administrative suspension is something that—the individual who is convicted of this never sees a day in court. It's done administratively, it's done without his day in court, which is one of the basic tenets, a basis of British law. You always have the right to appear in court, and yet here in this bill your licence can be suspended administratively without ever appearing in court.

The alcohol concept of this, the zero tolerance for alcohol: As was pointed out by my friend from Oshawa this afternoon in statements, such things as vanilla extract, mouthwash, Benylin or some cough medicines contain significant quantities of alcohol, and the mere presence of them in the mouth can register on the alcohol blow machines the police carry. They could be convicted and have an administrative suspension without ever having been guilty, without ever having consumed alcohol as was intended in the act. So a zero level of alcohol may be desirable, but it certainly isn't enforceable.

As the member for Thornhill pointed out in his eloquent speech of just a few minutes ago, if someone has the maturity to obtain a licence, then they also have the maturity to be treated equally under that licence. Regardless of whether they're 19 or 20, or whether they're 45 or 50, or whether they're 65 or 70, they should be treated the same; under this piece of legislation they're not, and particularly so when it comes to the alcohol provisions. If 0.08 is not good enough for people in Ontario, then the 0.08 should be changed, not some people in Ontario being picked on, pointed out or being treated unequally.

This piece of legislation also has the effect of distracting the government and the people, the public in Ontario, from the crisis in our economy. That's another problem that I find with Bill 126: It takes away from perhaps one of the most urgent times in our history, when we need action on the economy. This bill is taking people's attention away from the economy, which is in such dire straits in this province today as we sink to the bottom of the 10 provinces and three territories.

I wonder why the province is telling people who are old enough to volunteer for Afghanistan, people who are old enough to cast a ballot in our voting system, who are old enough to walk into either a bar or a liquor store and purchase alcohol, who are old enough to get married, who are old enough to have children—I wonder why this government is telling them that they are not old enough, they are not responsible enough to drive the same as every other adult out there. I wonder why this government is telling them that. It seems to me that this is an emotional reaction. Although much of politics is emotional, legislative action should be based on the facts; it should be based on a sincere understanding of those facts and a reaction to them.

This bill also talks about the increased penalties that are levied against drivers who pass from one area to another. A fine for careless driving, for instance, increases fivefold. That's a huge increase. It's something that is necessary, and it's something that I would support in this act. The increased fine for not stopping at a red light goes up astronomically as well. That is something else in this bill that I would support. The bill is not entirely wrong, but the concept of the bill when it attacks the rights of individuals I take great exception to, and I think this government should continue its review, as it has done, as it announced in question period today; it should continue that review and have a serious look at some of the other parts of this bill.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It being 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 9 of the clock, Tuesday, December 9.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	

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Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
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Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of International Trade and Investment / Ministre du Commerce international et de l'Investissement
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London—Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland—Quinte West	
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Howard Hampton, Greg Sorbara
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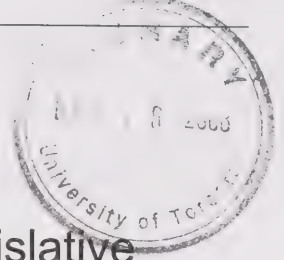
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Première session, 39^e législature

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Journal des débats (Hansard)

Tuesday 9 December 2008

Mardi 9 décembre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 9 December 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 9 décembre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the non-denominational prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CORONERS AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES CORONERS

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 3, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 115, An Act to amend the Coroners Act / Projet de loi 115, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les coroners.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I just want to make a couple of comments in this regard. It is a bill that a few of my colleagues have already spoken to. It's a bill that we are quite eager to send to hearings, because we believe that by and large much of what is recommended is positive. There is some serious disagreement on the bill that I will speak to as well, briefly, because I think it's important to speak to it. But some of the bill provisions I think are useful to repeat and to support.

They want to create a registry of qualified practising pathologists approved to perform post-mortem examinations to be established by the chief forensic pathologist; establish a death investigation oversight council to provide oversight for the death investigation, with responsibilities that include monitoring and overseeing compliance with the act; oversight with strategic planning and preparing an annual report for the minister—useful; establish legislative authority for the chief coroner to appoint appropriately qualified death investigators to perform the duties of a coroner, providing for greater flexibility in northern and First Nations communities where doctors may not be available—a useful provision; and provide coroners with the authority to release information from a death investigation to advance public safety and prevent similar deaths.

These kinds of provisions are, on the whole, very good, and we're very eager to have people comment on these. The provision that I will speak to as well is they will remove the ability of the minister to call an inquest, which was not recommended by the judge who wrote this

report, and that's something that New Democrats are concerned about and want to speak to. Much of the report written by Judge Goudge, but not solely—it was a lengthy inquiry—dealt with the behaviour of the pathologist, the so-called Dr. Charles Smith.

This is a story that has concerned many of us, because as a result of the decisions he made, many innocent people went to jail for allegedly having killed their babies. When you send innocent people to jail on the basis of their having killed their children, it has serious implications for those individuals.

I just can't imagine—and those of us, of course, who cannot dream of ever hurting a child—that a child should die and that a parent or a relative should be accused of the killing of the child—wrongly accused. Just imagine what that means. Imagine the accusation of having killed a child. Imagine the shame, the ignominy, and the long-lasting feeling of pain and anger that one would feel under those circumstances. How do you deal with that? And how do you deal with that if you've been put in jail for two years, five years, seven years, 10 years? It's just unspeakable, unspeakable.

All this, because Dr. Charles Smith was assumed to be a very competent pathologist, but it turns out he wasn't very competent at all. It turns out that there were many stories connected to the issue of competence but it was never followed through. As a result of that, so many people have been hurt so badly. How do you compensate them for that? I don't know how you do that, I just don't. But we have to find a way to compensate and money, yes, is not the sole way to repay them for the wrong that has been done, but it certainly is one way to help out to restore the lives that have been so badly damaged. That's one issue that was dealt with in the Goudge report, and we support it very strongly.

This bill removes a section from the Coroners Act—which New Democrats do not support—that is, section 22 of the Coroners Act, which allows the Minister of Community Safety to call for an inquest, notwithstanding that local or regional coroners or, indeed, the chief coroner, may have decided not to do so. We believe this section should be retained and should be maintained and used when necessary. We know this is a rarely used provision and, because it's rarely used, we think it should stay within the purview of the minister to be able to have it there in the event that, for whatever reason, political or otherwise, the wisdom in the judicious use of that provision is useful to have.

We don't quite understand why the government is eager to move away by dropping that provision. If it's

rarely used, why take it away? The government can argue that it's rarely used, so there's no reason to keep it. But we say, because it's rarely used, that is the reason to keep it. Does it indicate that the government is clearly moving away from coroners' inquests? Oh, sure, they can say, "No, we're not doing that. Local, regional, chief coroners can do that at any time." But does the mere fact that this provision should be removed by the government from use by a minister who might feel the need to do so hint at a move away from using this section? I suggest, and New Democrats suggest, that it does.

0910

The argument advanced by the government was that Judge Goudge indicated we should remove this provision; that was the hint, the suggestion that was made. Andrea Horwath, our critic, was in the ministerial discussions where MPPs are briefed, and that's where she was alerted to this particular problem. So she, along with our researchers, went and dug up the report and looked at it and discovered that Judge Goudge's recommendations were very clear and said that the minister should be retaining his opportunity to order an inquest under section 22. So contrary to what had been suggested by the government through the minister, Judge Goudge said this provision should be retained.

So we say to the government, why move away from the use of this section? Why take it away when Judge Goudge said you should be retaining it? Why is it that you have an interest in simply, for whatever reason, saying this is of no value to you when Judge Goudge, having done a lengthy investigation, a lengthy inquiry, proposed that you keep it?

We believe that you should keep this section. This is one of the reasons we want to be able to take this out to committee hearings, where we are looking forward to comments on this report, on Bill 115, from many, many people who have expertise in this particular field. The expertise of others who are actively involved would be very, very helpful to me and to members of government, because this is an issue they deal with on a regular basis.

The Criminal Lawyers' Association, for example, is one association I want to hear from; the Ontario Bar Association is another; and many other lawyers who are actively involved. We think the majority of these recommendations are very useful. We oppose the elimination of section 22, and we hope that the government, in the end, after those hearings, will listen to the folks and hopefully change that. I just wanted to put those few things on the record.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I was listening very closely to my colleague from Trinity-Spadina, and I think he did raise some of the more, let's say, debatable points about Bill 115, An Act to amend the Coroners Act. I guess what it sort of brings to mind is the fact that there is a huge responsibility on our government—on all governments—in terms of dealing with deaths, accidental or otherwise, and sometimes we never stop to reflect on the expertise

we need in our coroner's department, the qualified men and women we need there.

As he said, stop and think about the agony this could bring to a family when there is a wrongful death involved. I know that the province of Newfoundland has just finished two years of public inquiry about the gaps in their pathology in diagnosing cancer in women. They have an acute shortage of pathologists in Newfoundland, so they've had to take on an aggressive policy of attracting qualified men and women.

This act is really a modernization, a bringing up to date and putting in more safeguards to ensure that our pathologists and coroners are up to the highest standards. It's something we don't like to talk about or deal with, but it's a reality that goes on in any jurisdiction. This act is an attempt to try to rectify some of those gaps.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: First of all, I want to pay respect to the member from Trinity-Spadina. He certainly put a human face on the tragedy, shock and bewilderment faced by families that would have been victimized, I suspect, by the findings of Dr. Smith. Of course, the Goudge inquiry was a direct result of that.

I think it's important that those in positions of authority like that are able to have some vindication, if you will, as a tragedy of any family under the circumstances, than to have that magnified by being accused of being guilty of the abuse that may have caused one of their children's death—just unimaginable. As a parent of five children, I certainly think the member from Trinity-Spadina put a human face to that story.

If you look at the legislation, it's fairly technical. The report on pediatric forensic pathology in Ontario was released in October 2008, and 11 themes and 169 recommendations came out of it. I guess this legislation is an attempt to put a framework structure around this. It's my understanding that this bill will go to committee, and in that process I would guess there will certainly be amendments. But I think we should put a voice and a face, as the member from Trinity-Spadina has done, on those who were victimized by someone in a position of authority who wasn't qualified to perform the function. Hopefully this legislation will correct that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Dave Levac: I want to thank the member from Trinity-Spadina; he knows I respect him. In our friendship, I have come to know that he speaks well of the social aspect of this bill. I too want to echo what he said about the tragedy that brought this on, along with the fact that this bill is in need of passage for the very sake of what happened, and I'm sure he understands that.

I'm hearing virtual support from all sides of the House, and that there are areas that need some correction. As I have now done carriage of a couple of bills, I would make the commitment to the member that it is my intention to listen carefully, to insist that we go to committee and to insist that we have the hearings he is

talking about. In the past, I have made it a point to ensure that all the points that need to be made get made, and then we, as a government, deliberate as to which of the points that are made are worthy of amendment. I make that commitment to him again.

The other point I wish to make—I said this before, and pointed directly at the minister and said he was not a pediatric pathology expert. There are very few people in this room who have the expertise that is required to analyze what is going on in those unfortunate deaths. When we revert to the clause the member is having concerns about, I ask us to remember—and I ask this with respect—why specifically do we need to have the minister's fingers in this very, very specific science when it comes to doing a review of whether or not an inquest should be held? I offer him that question, and maybe he can help me with that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): There's time for one last question or comment.

I'll return to the member for Trinity-Spadina, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I thank the friends who have spoken in response to what I said.

For me, having the power by the government to be able to call an inquest is a power I would not want to give away. There are often different reasons why we may need that power. Even though we rarely use it, I think it's a power that exists for the purposes of seeking justice. Yes, coroners do that on a regular basis; that is their job. And yes, they are the experts; that is true. There are times when a government needs to intervene. We don't do it for the purpose of just having fun. These are serious issues. When you call an inquest, you call an inquest in order to be able to get to the bottom of the problem—to allow ordinary people who have been affected in a very serious way to respond—and to be able to make recommendations as a way of preventing future deaths from happening wherever they happen, whether they are in a workplace, or a hospital or wherever it is that they happen.

It is a power that we do not ever want to abuse, but it is a power that we should have in order to be able to say to people, "This is something that governments take seriously. This is something that governments want the power to use in the event that we deem it necessary to do so as a way of making sure that the prevention happens. It's not something that should be used as a regular tool, but it should be there for the purpose of using it when necessary but not necessarily in every circumstance. I'm not sure whether or not we can deal with those differences, but I hope we can.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Bartolucci has moved second reading of Bill 115. Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? I recognize the Minister of Tourism.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I would ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): So ordered. Orders of the day?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: We have no further business this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I therefore indicate to the House that we stand in recess until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 0922 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I would like to introduce some guests today who are relatives of Bradyn Litster, our page from Hamilton. His grandmother Irene Noack and his mother, Monika Litster, are here, and I'd would like to welcome them on behalf of the Legislature.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I have two welcoming items. The first is to one of our Ajax-Pickering youth Parliament members Kurtis McAleer, who is in the west gallery. We welcome him back again.

Also, I would like to introduce a school class which is, as we speak, on their way. It took me three hours to come in on the 401 this morning, and they're pretty close to the area where I live. Those are the grade 5 students from Valley Farm Public School in Pickering. Many thanks to their organizer, Debbie Kravis, and everyone who is joining us from the school today. We expect them momentarily.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I want to introduce some guests who don't happen to be with us, but are in the Legislative Building today, and they are the members of the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance. I remind all members that there will be beautiful poinsettias in the Leg dining room. Be sure to visit our friends from TOGA.

Mr. Michael Prue: I would like to introduce some guests who will be joining us shortly in the west members' gallery. I'd like to introduce Leonard Nieberg and his wife, Cynthia, and Petra Moore and her husband, Rick. They're here to observe the Legislature.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: There's a spouse in the House, and it's mine. I just want to introduce my husband, Gil Gaspar.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity on behalf of page Sarah Danchuk to welcome her grandmother Helen Danchuk and her grandfather Peter Danchuk joining us here in the Legislature today.

Also I would like to welcome some guests of mine in the Speaker's gallery, some constituency staff and some friends: Kathie Cunningham, Craig Bradford, Kim Davis, Veronika Sonier, Alisa Leitch, Lucy Gouveia, Kyle Gouveia, Don Kilpatrick and Andrew Kilpatrick. Welcome to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TOBACCO CONTROL

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Premier and deals with yesterday's report from the Auditor General and with an issue that the official opposition has raised many times over the past few years, to no avail, and that's your government's failure to deal with the issue of contraband cigarettes. The Auditor General points out that by adopting your look-the-other-way justice system and ignoring this problem, you are costing half a billion dollars a year in lost taxes to the province.

Premier, why should law-abiding Ontarians have to put up with the cuts you've announced to family health teams and nurses just because, as the Auditor General said, you lack the will to collect the taxes you're owed?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to begin by thanking the Auditor General for the work he has done once again. Sometimes in government we remain so focused at the 30,000-foot level that we don't have a good understanding of what's happening on the front lines, and we rely on folks like the Auditor General, the Ombudsman and other people to shine a light into those places and make sure we are in fact getting value for money.

On the matter of tobacco taxes, we have made some progress; I think it's important to acknowledge that. But there's obviously still more work to be done. In particular, we have doubled our convictions since last year, we've increased enforcement measures five times since 2003 and we've increased tobacco seizures by 365%. That's year over year, so we are making progress.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: As I said, we've been raising this issue for a number of years. He talks about enforcement. I've talked to a small business operator in my riding, a convenience store operator, who has been inspected a dozen times and audited by your inspectors, while we have illegal operations on government-owned land, which you completely ignore. You're hassling these honest, law-abiding small businessmen having a very difficult time in this difficult economy, yet you're turning a blind eye to other illegal operations. You're costing Ontario taxpayers \$500 million, while you're laying off nurses, cutting back on family health teams—a host of programs that are important to everyday hard-working, law-abiding Ontarians. Why will you not take effective action to deal with this problem?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I thank the member for the supplemental. I think he does a disservice to police services across the country when he ignores the fact that police services are working co-operatively on an hourly basis—in fact, on a minute-by-minute basis—and they're having incredible success. Sure, there's more work to do and we will continue to do our part, the OPP will continue to do their part and we will work together on this

problem to ensure that we eliminate as much contraband tobacco as is possible. But for him to say that nothing's happening is a disservice to the OPP, the RCMP and the IBET, and he should be ashamed of himself.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It's regrettable this minister stood in the House today and bad-mouthed the Auditor General of this province. That's effectively what he did. We're referencing the report and the concern expressed by the Auditor General of this province. He's the one saying that you lack the will—you and your government, your colleagues—to enforce the law in this province. It's your look-the-other-way justice system when it comes to dealing with these illegal operations.

I'm asking you a very specific question: What are you going to do about this? Why don't you enact and enforce the laws? This is not a slight on police. The Auditor General is saying you're costing Ontario taxpayers \$500 million, while you're slashing, cutting and freezing important programs that serve all Ontarians. Why will you not enforce the law?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: For the interim leader to say that the OPP, the RCMP and the IBET are not enforcing the law is a gross overstatement. They are being very, very successful. October 30: 500,000 cigarettes seized; November 1: 257,000 cigarettes seized; November 26: 50 cartons of cigars, 2,332 cartons of fine-cut tobacco. There is more work to do. We appreciate the Auditor General's report and the recommendations, but don't ever let it be said that the OPP is not doing their job. They are doing their job very, very effectively. They will continue to work with their policing partners and we will be successful on this.

CORRECTIONAL FACILITY EMPLOYEES

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Back to the Premier. The people of this province are not the dupes you think they are and the police know that the person not doing his job is that minister.

Premier, again, back to the Auditor General's report in speaking to incompetence and mismanagement, which seem to be the order of the day with respect to his commentary. Particularly glaring, I believe, is the blatant abuse of sick leave among jail guards, taking an average of 32 days of sick leave a year. That's an increase of 63% since 2001, costing Ontarians \$20 million a year. Premier, how could you have allowed this to happen? Is your minister AWOL on this file as well?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to thank the auditor as well for this particular advice. Obviously, that rate of sick leave is unacceptable. There is obviously a serious problem associated with this. I've asked the minister to take a careful look at this, but I want to say to Ontario taxpayers that this is an unacceptable rate of absenteeism and sick leave. We're not prepared to accept it. We will do the necessary work to find out more precisely what is

causing it and we'll do everything that we can to address it.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Well, last time I checked, this government had been in office for over five years. I will admit this has been a consistent problem in the system, but it has doubled on your watch. That's how significant this problem has become. The Auditor General pointed to one corrections facility that was privately operated until your ideological closure. When the government took over operation of that jail, privately operated, absenteeism jumped by 55% in one year. Talk about incompetence and mismanagement. Premier, I ask you again, why should Ontarians have any faith in terms of your government knowing how to manage their tax dollars efficiently? What specific steps are you taking? Let's hear some specific steps today, not these generalities. How are you dealing with this problem?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services can speak to that.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I thank the member again for the supplemental question. We have implemented a program to track absenteeism in our correctional facilities. We will continue to do that tracking. We will continue to work in a very, very proactive way with our partners in correction, the union and all levels in the correctional services part of our ministry, to ensure that we reduce that number, because, as the Premier said, that number is too high. It's not acceptable to me; it's not acceptable to this government; it's not acceptable to the opposition. And do you know what? It's not acceptable to the correctional services officers also.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: What an enlightening response: "It's not acceptable." The minister, I think, has been in his job for over a year now. I have to suspect—he seemed to be completely caught off guard yesterday when he was asked about this, which has to be surprising, shocking and alarming with respect to this problem.

This problem has grown under his government's watch, dramatically grown. We're looking at this province being in a recession, hundreds of thousands of people losing their jobs, and you have government employees taking over a month off—paid leave, effectively. Over a year on the job, five years plus that this government has been in office, and you don't have anything but generalities, again saying, "We're concerned. We're concerned. We're concerned." Well, Ontario taxpayers, hard-working, honest Ontarians, want action, not words like "Concerned, concerned." When are you going to do something? Let us know what the specifics are.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Well, let me speak a little bit more slowly, then. We have implemented a program to track absenteeism in our correctional institutions. I think that's very proactive. We will continue to work with our partners in correctional services to diminish that number. I think that is proactive. And we will continue to be very

proactive with all our partners to ensure that that number comes down. We've all agreed that that number is too high, and we're going to work together to ensure that the number comes down.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Premier. The Auditor General says that the McGuinty government could have built a 716-bed public not-for-profit hospital in Brampton for \$380 million. Instead, the McGuinty government chose to build a 479-bed profit-driven corporate consortium hospital that cost \$614 million.

Given the Auditor General's finding that when the McGuinty government put a profit-driven corporate consortium in charge of the Brampton Hospital, the costs skyrocketed, will the Premier order an audit by the Auditor General of the Sarnia and North Bay hospital projects, where similar profit-driven corporate consortia are all involved?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Of course it's up to the auditor to decide what he'd like to take a look at and we welcome his oversight in any area that he deems to be appropriate. With respect to this particular hospital, my honourable colleague knows that there was an agreement which had been entered into by the previous Conservative government.

Hon. David Caplan: As the auditor pointed out.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: As the auditor pointed out. We made what changes we could to that agreement. The good news is that the people of Brampton now have a brand new public hospital. It will grow to 608 beds. The other good news is that we have introduced some real, solid changes recognized by the auditor with respect to how we deal with these kinds of construction projects on an ongoing basis. In particular, we now have a value-for-money assessment that must be done before any decision is made regarding finances.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier knows it was in fact his government that continued to okay the profit-driven corporate consortia Brampton hospital, which skyrocketed the cost of the hospital and provided fewer beds. The Auditor General gives three reasons why these profit-driven corporate consortia hospitals cost more. First, the corporation has to pay more for borrowing than the province pays. Second, the benefit of your so-called risk transfer concept is seriously overstated. Three, the private sector profit-driven consultants who get involved charge a lot of money. The Premier can talk about how this is a good deal. The fact of the matter is, the Auditor General found it's a very bad deal.

The question is, is the Premier going to continue to follow the Conservatives or is the Premier going to order an audit of the North Bay and Sarnia hospital projects where profit—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, we've made changes. We're following our own particular process and I think one of the most important defining characteristics of our process, unlike the previous Conservative government process, is that there has to be a value-for-money assessment done. That means if we're going to build a new courthouse or a new hospital, we have to go through the numbers and make a real assessment as to whether it's going to be less expensive under the traditional financing method, where the government borrows the money, or whether it's less expensive under our AFP model. We are open to this. In some cases we're building hospitals under this AFP method, where we borrow private money, or we do it under the traditional methods; it depends on the outcome. We're always trying to get the best possible value for Ontario taxpayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier says that a profit-driven private consortium hospital in Brampton that costs \$250 million more and delivers fewer beds is a good deal. It's not just the Auditor General; the mayor of Sarnia knows that the hospital redevelopment there, if it were done on a public, not-for-profit basis, would cost about \$120 million. The latest figures from the McGuinty government, using the profit-driven model, put it at over \$300 million. We were told that the North Bay hospital, done on a public, not-for-profit basis, would cost about \$400 million. We're now told that the profit-driven model is headed for \$1 billion plus. How much evidence does the Premier need before he orders an audit of these profit-driven Bay Street consortium hospitals that are costing far more money than an ordinary public, not-for-profit hospital would cost?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not sure of the source of the numbers that my honourable colleague is introducing here today. I haven't heard them before.

I can say that we're committed to doing two very important things for Ontarians when it comes to health care. First of all, it is to make sure they have the best possible care in every community. Secondly, we are committed to building new hospitals where that's appropriate to do so. We want to do that using the least public money possible.

Again, these assessments that we make, by the way, are available online for people to examine themselves. We make a determination as to whether it better serves the public interest that we go with the traditional financing method or whether we use this new AFP model. But in every case, I want to assure Ontarians that the hospitals are publicly owned and publicly controlled.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question. The leader of the third party.

1050

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier again, I think the Auditor General's report speaks for itself: public hospital, \$380 million, profit-driven corporate hospital,

\$614 million. Only Dalton McGuinty would say that's a good deal.

I want to ask the Premier about some other serious problems. The Auditor General reports that over the last five years under the McGuinty government, the number of criminal charges pending in our courts grew by 17% to more than 275,000. At the same time, the number of charges pending for more than eight months increased 16%.

Do you know what this means, Premier? It means the McGuinty government is setting up Ontario for another Askov decision, where thousands of criminal charges get thrown out of the courts. What have you been doing with our court system that you would allow such a scandalous situation to take place?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Attorney General.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I agree with the auditor when he says that faster criminal justice means better public security. I agree with the auditor when he suggests that faster criminal justice is more effective criminal justice.

I spoke to the issue of the unproductive adjournments and their great increase last March. In June, we launched Justice on Target, which for the first time ever has set a public target of reducing unproductive adjournments and the time to dispose of criminal cases by 30% over four years. We're already in the first three action sites: London, Newmarket, and North York. We're going to reduce the target and free up resources for better public security and better, more effective criminal justice.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government wants to pretend there is no problem here. I want to remind the Premier and the Attorney General of something that just happened a few months ago, where many members of the so-called Toronto Police Service drug squad had literally dozens of criminal charges against them for thievery, assault and extortion. It was called the largest case of police corruption in the history of Canada. Do you know what happened? The charges were thrown out of court. Why? Because of unreasonable delay.

These are some of the charges that are being thrown out of our courts now, because the McGuinty government talks a good line about criminal justice and meanwhile the number of criminal charges that aren't being dealt with grows every day. Again, how can the McGuinty government, after five years, allow such a scandalous situation to happen in our criminal courts?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Far from the suggestion being made by the leader of the third party, and having worked in the system for almost 25 years, I know this issue has been with us for a long time. After the 50,000 to 80,000 charges disappeared under Askov—the honourable member was in charge—we saw appearances—

Interjections.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: No, no—we saw appearances and time to disposition increase for 15 years steadily. That's why we brought in the Justice on Target strategy. We brought it in to reduce the number of un-

necessary appearances, which by the fourth year will mean there are half a million fewer unnecessary adjournments every year. That means police not waiting in court, crowns not dealing with cases that don't need to be dealt with, courts not just adjourning cases—more effective justice for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I find some irony here that a member of the McGuinty government would refer to the Askov decision. I want to remind you what happened. Under the last Liberal government of David Peterson, between 1985 and 1990, thousands of criminal charges were allowed to sit in the criminal court system until the Supreme Court of Canada threw them out in 1990. So saying that this is somehow acceptable is not acceptable—not acceptable for anyone.

Over the last five years, the McGuinty government has allowed this situation to grow again. You say there's no problem. I think there's a problem when the largest police corruption case in the history of Canada is thrown out under the McGuinty government because of unreasonable delay. I think there's a problem when thievery and corruption by the police is thrown out.

Again, what is the McGuinty government going to do, other than try to blame someone else?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I would simply say that the matter he refers to is under appeal, and the trial hasn't actually occurred yet, so the conclusions might be a little off base from a former Attorney General.

I'd simply say that nothing I suggested, nothing I've said and nothing we've done in the past year suggests anything other than a determination to reform our justice system to make it faster and more effective. We're already under way with Justice on Target. The Code-LeSage report—former Chief Justice LeSage and Michael Code—gave us excellent advice with respect to the most complex cases, and we're already implementing its major recommendations. I don't suggest for a moment that any particular leader in this House is responsible for the increase in court backlogs, but it has been an issue for decades and now we're finally addressing it.

TORONTO CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Education. In June this year, the minister advised the Toronto Catholic District School Board that she was taking over control of that board to take over the administration of the affairs of that board. One would assume that that would include paying of bills for work that has been done for that school board.

I'd like the minister to explain why a company in this province, CEC Mechanical Ltd., is being forced to go to court to collect on \$485,000 worth of work that they did for the board. Through repeated letters, there was an admittance that the money is owed. To date, after months of procedure, they are still waiting for the money. Will

the minister explain why the incompetency that she was intending to replace continues at that board?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Indeed, there is a provincial supervisor in the Toronto Catholic District School Board. I do not have the information that the member opposite is seeking. I certainly can get that information for him, but I have to say that the running of the Toronto Catholic District School Board by Mr. Norbert Hartmann has vastly improved over the last few months to what it was previously. We have new expense guidelines for trustees; there are new governance processes in place. There is a much tighter ship at the Toronto Catholic board.

I will certainly get the information on this particular case, and I'd be happy to do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: I appreciate that undertaking by the minister. Here's what David Beswick of CEC Mechanical Ltd. said: "We have never seen action of this nature by a provincially funded body in 23 years of business, with completion of in excess of 450 projects of this nature."

I welcome the minister's intervention in this at a time when businesses across this province are finding it difficult, given the economic challenges, to keep their doors open. This board and this government should pay their bill. What business can possibly sustain the non-payment of \$450,000?

I would ask that the minister look into it immediately. I'll be pleased to provide her with the documents and ask her whether she would be willing to speak to the president of this company to get some background and detail on the matter.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've already undertaken to look into this situation, but I want to make a broader point about the way we do business in this House. I just want to be clear that I do everything I can to be accessible to my constituents and to the members opposite.

I do not have any correspondence on this issue from the member opposite, and I would have been happy before the House—not that I need to be prepared for questions; I can answer the questions on the fly. But it would be reasonable for the member opposite to let me know, and I would be happy then to have an answer for him either in question period or after question period.

TECHNICAL STANDARDS AND SAFETY AUTHORITY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services. The Auditor General has been noting concern about the way the Technical Standards and Safety Authority has been overseen since 2003, five years prior to the explosion at Sunrise Propane. Yesterday, the Auditor General again flagged the TSSA's self-regulation as a huge problem in this province. Why won't this minister admit that the TSSA has failed and have the ministry take direct responsibility for oversight and enforcement of Ontario's safety standards?

1100

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I am very pleased to answer this question. In 2003, the Auditor General made about four recommendations, and all those recommendations in fact have been implemented. These recommendations were establishing the administrative agreements, and these have been established with five organizations already. Then there was a recommendation that we should have more appointees from different groups and independent directors at these organizations. We are doing that. In fact, for the TSSA, we used to appoint about 24% of the directors, and I have already instructed them that we will be appointing 46% of the directors. So we are moving ahead with all those.

In addition to that, everybody is aware in this House that I asked the specialists to give me some recommendations and I will be more than pleased to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I don't believe that doubling the number of directors is going to make one hill of beans of difference in terms of the safety of Ontarians.

The Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union, whose members have work that falls under the auspices of TSSA oversight, are actually supporting a call for the TSSA to be taken over, to become directly the responsibility of this minister. They don't trust the TSSA to get the safety job done in this province. I don't think that Ontarians trust them, either.

Two people died on that devastating day in August. That explosion, as everyone knows, could have been significantly worse.

Why won't the minister admit that the TSSA has failed, and have the ministry take direct responsibility for oversight and enforcement of Ontario safety standards, as CEP is calling for and as the NDP is calling for?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: It's one thing to ask questions in the House. The other thing is actually to do and take some concrete actions. I'm not sure the member has even gone and seen where the incident took place. I was there, the Premier was there, and we have seen it.

In addition to that, we appointed two experts right away in August. We asked them to make recommendations, which were delivered to us in November, and 30 out of the 40 recommendations have already been acted upon. And the other one, we are working on. I have written to the federal government, and if there are legislative changes required, we will make those legislative changes.

Safety is important to us, and we will make sure that the TSSA and all other organizations make sure that all Ontarians are safe.

LINCOLN M. ALEXANDER AWARD

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question this morning is to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. The Honourable Lincoln M. Alexander is one of Ontario's most well-thought-of Lieutenant Governors. His story is one of firsts and barriers broken. After distinguishing himself in

the Royal Canadian Air Force during the Second World War, Mr. Alexander attended Osgoode Hall Law School and then became Canada's first black member of Parliament and ultimately a cabinet minister. Upon his appointment as Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, Mr. Alexander used his time in office to bring a great deal of attention to the issues of race and equality.

I think that you will agree it is fitting that the Lincoln M. Alexander Award is presented annually in his honour. Minister, could you please share with the members of the Legislature some details about this very important and distinguished award?

Hon. Michael Chan: My thanks to the honourable member. Tomorrow I will have the honour of joining the Lieutenant Governor, the Honourable David C. Onley, at the presentation ceremony for the Lincoln M. Alexander Award.

The award is presented annually on or around December 10, the anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Now in its 15th year, this award recognizes youth who have demonstrated leadership and made significant contributions toward elimination of racial discrimination in their community and around the province.

The award is presented each year. Two student awards are given to senior secondary school students, and a single community award is also presented to a youth between 16 and 25 years of age.

I look forward to honouring these outstanding students tomorrow.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thank you, Minister. Lincoln Alexander has frequently said, "An individual can be instrumental in changing society." I know that I and many members of this Legislature also know that to be absolutely true.

Minister, I am hoping that you can share with our colleagues some information about the recipients of the Lincoln M. Alexander Award and how they are instrumental in changing society.

I am also very proud to share that one recipient, Ms. Muna Ali, is a resident of the great riding of Peterborough.

Hon. Michael Chan: My thanks to the member for Peterborough for helping to highlight these important awards.

All members of this Legislature agree that race must never be a barrier to success in Ontario. Ms. Muna Ali of Peterborough, Ms. Chris-Ann Manning of Ajax and Mr. Femi Doyle-Marshall of Scarborough not only believe this maxim, they live it. They are not only leaders in the fight to eliminate racial discrimination, but leaders in their respective communities.

To highlight but one example, Ms. Muna Ali of Peterborough has been active in many communities, including the Community Race Relations Committee of Peterborough, the Kwartha World Issues Centre and the Ontario Public Interest Research Group.

The McGuinty government understands that racism must not be tolerated in any form. All members of this Legislature can learn from the examples set by—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Premier. The Auditor General's report has revealed serious problems with our criminal justice system. Despite an investment of almost \$100 million, the Auditor General said the backlog of criminal cases in our court system has risen by 16%, now sitting at its highest level in 15 years. And what has your government done about it? It has thrown piles of money at the system without even knowing what the problem is. Why is that? Because you don't track criminal cases and have no idea how many are being thrown out because of delay.

Premier, how can you possibly fix the system without even knowing what the problem is?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Attorney General.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I think that my friend makes a good point. Over the past five years, we've invested in more judges, more justices of the peace, more crowns, more police; we have more courts and more courthouses. But what we've seen is that the number of adjournments has actually increased dramatically, as it has for the past 15 years. The justice-on-target strategy is all about reducing those unproductive appearances, those adjournments, so that every participant in the justice system can get on with what everybody considers more important: the resolution of cases by way of plea, by way of trial, freeing up courtrooms, freeing up courthouses, police not sitting in the courts waiting for adjournments; they're out on the street where we would rather they be, investigating or preventing crimes. That's the purpose of the justice-on-target strategy: to make the courts more effective, not just more of them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Again to the Premier, with respect to the comments made by the Attorney General, the issue of adjournments is only one part of the criminal justice system. In 2006, we asked your government to support our bill, which would require certain statistics to be kept with respect to the criminal justice system that would assist in knowing exactly where all of the problems are, not just one. Yesterday, the Auditor General told you exactly what we told you several years ago.

Premier, are you prepared to make truth and transparency in the justice system the law in Ontario by agreeing to provide and maintain the basic statistics that we asked for pursuant to our bill several years ago?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: For the first time in the history of this province, if you go on the website www.justiceontargetontario you can find all the stats from every Ontario Court of Justice in every part of this province. It's never happened before. It doesn't get more transparent than that. What they'll show you is that of the

average nine appearances that every criminal case takes now, six are adjournments. We do a lot of adjournments every year; justice on target gets people to stop adjourning cases, get to the decision point faster. It frees up the police to be back out on the street, the crowns to be dealing with the cases. Faster justice means better public safety and security. Faster justice is more effective justice. That's what justice on target is all about. We'll keep my friend apprised, as all Ontarians, through the website.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. The manufacturing job crisis in Ontario worsens each day. The province has lost 5% of its manufacturing jobs in just one month, including companies usually immune to economic ups and downs. In London, 3M recently laid off 120 workers and has announced the likelihood of hundreds more. The McGuinty response was to tell people to go shopping, and then take a two-month holiday.

Is this the kind of leadership hard-working Ontarians deserve at this most difficult and anxious time?

1110

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that if my friend had the opportunity to reflect for a moment, he would not put his question that way. I know that every member of this House is concerned by the global economic crisis and the impact that it's having on Ontario. The single largest issue we face with respect to our manufacturing sector is the drying up of American demand. The overwhelming majority of our products are sent to the US, and since consumer demand there is so low, it's having a direct impact on us.

What we are doing is finding ways to help workers who lose their jobs. We have a retraining program in place. We have, I think, over \$1.5 billion in funds available to help strengthen our manufacturers so that if they're prepared to make additional investments and take additional risks, we're prepared to support them in that regard. But I think it's just straight unfair to say that we're not bringing something to the table when it comes to helping our workers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: Premier, I don't know if this is the best time to shut down for two months. The government talks as though it was taking significant action, but it has no bold plan to protect urgently at-risk manufacturing jobs. It has minimal investment in public infrastructure, no plan to spark investments in green jobs, and it has no social investment plan to create jobs through affordable housing, child care and income assistance. Is the McGuinty government going on a holiday to run from its lack of action or because it simply doesn't have the answers that the people of Ontario need?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: One of the important national—and even continental—debates has to do with the best way to stimulate the economy. I think there's certainly a growing consensus that one of the very best ways to do that is to invest in infrastructure.

In this very year, this fiscal year 2007-08, our government is investing \$9.9 billion in infrastructure. In the transportation sector, it's \$4.1 billion; in health, it's \$925 million; education, \$1.8 billion; the environment, \$390 million; municipal, \$1.8 billion; justice, \$250 million; and in other areas combined it's \$720 million, for a total of \$9.9 billion. On a per capita basis, I'm not aware of any other jurisdiction in North America that's putting that much money into their infrastructure. It's good for our economy and it's good for jobs.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Today I've got a question for the Minister of Culture. In the last few months, there's been much discussion about the importance of culture as an economic driver, especially since Ontario's cultural industries contribute almost \$20 billion to our gross domestic product and create over a quarter of a million jobs. Now more than ever, it's important that the government invest in innovative ways to help to grow our economy, and by investing in industries that help our economy now, we strengthen our economy over the long term.

Would the minister tell this House just what the government is doing to strengthen Ontario's cultural industries so we can generate economic growth here in the province and remain competitive overseas?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: Over the last decade, Ontario's creative industries have grown faster than the rest of the economy. In the next 20 years, job growth in these industries is expected to surpass most of Ontario's employment sectors. Ontario's cultural industries are a vital contributor to our economic growth and prosperity, and that's why the government's \$3.3-million investment in the entertainment and creative cluster partnership has been so successful.

This investment supports 16 innovative projects and involves 80 collaborative partners, and this investment is part of this McGuinty government's five-point economic plan to invest in skills and knowledge, innovation and strength in partnerships. By investing in these cultural industries, we're creating more opportunities for that industry, here and abroad.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: As you know, my riding of Oakville is home to Sheridan College. It's a nationally and internationally renowned training institution, famous for its animation and digital media programs. Through innovative partnerships with the public and private sectors, Sheridan is leading the way with its cutting-edge research while providing students with tremendous learning opportunities. I understand that the fund which the minister speaks of assists Ontario's creative industries by promoting collaboration between commercial theatre, music, book and magazine publishing, film, television and the media industries. The innovative research at Sheridan College seems to be consistent with the purpose

of the entertainment and creative cluster partnerships fund.

Can the minister explain how Sheridan College's research and expertise qualifies for a grant through this fund?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I am very happy to advise my colleague from Oakville that Sheridan College indeed recently received a project grant from our government's entertainment and creative cluster partnerships fund. Sheridan College, in connection with DGC Ontario, FilmOntario and Filmport, received a \$300,000 grant to launch the creative previsualization unit. This unit, just so all of you will know better what is meant by that, will establish a facility for previsualization research and training for film and television and other screen-based media in Ontario. It combines the latest technologies, including 3D modelling and motion capture systems, as well as technologies for rapid modelling. This project is one that will promote collaboration and new approaches, and it will again help us—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

RURAL ONTARIO

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. Premier, under your government, Ontario lost 66,000 jobs last month. Since your election, hundreds of thousands of jobs have disappeared in Ontario.

Many of those have been in my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke: Smurfit-MBI, 139 jobs; Timminco, which used to employ as many as 500, now closed; ATC Panels, 130 jobs; TeleTech, 329 jobs. In the forestry sector, thousands of jobs have already gone or are threatened.

Your plan is not working, Premier. Will you please bring forth a new plan, or are you just going to continue to ignore the needs of rural Ontarians?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We are very appreciative of everything that folks living in rural Ontario do to create for themselves the best quality of life and to contribute to an extraordinary quality of life that we enjoy here in Ontario. I know that they too have been affected by this global economic crisis and they are experiencing some of its impact here in the province of Ontario, as we are in urban Ontario as well.

One of the most important things that we are going to continue to do is to invest in infrastructure. I talked about that \$9.9 billion for infrastructure that we're investing in fiscal 2007-08, which is this year. Part of that is \$1.8 billion through our municipal partners. While the member is putting his supplementary to me, I'm going to see if I can find in this very lengthy list some of the projects that are specific to his riding.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Premier, infrastructure is important, there's no question about that, but that is not going to save jobs in those industries in Renfrew county that are most threatened. When I talk to people like Dean

Felhaber of Hokum lumber, or Bill Hall, who is 78 years old and considering getting out of the forestry business because he cannot survive any longer, they tell me that it has never been worse in 50 years.

You need to come up with a plan, and not your eastern Ontario economic development plan, which has seen one application from Renfrew county because the thresholds are so ridiculous that nobody qualifies. You need to sit down with the industry and find out what is going to work for them. You need to sit down with the forest industry in Renfrew county and find out what is going to work for them, not for you and your bureaucrats. Talk to the people who are affected. This industry is in trouble. It is up to you to come forth with something and come forth soon, before we don't have a forest industry in Renfrew county.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I can't help but admire my honourable colleague's passion. I think we all want to do everything that we can to help our constituents in these trying times.

But back to what I referenced a moment ago, I note that, through our infrastructure spending in the city of Pembroke, we're talking \$1.325 million. Just by way of example, in the county of Renfrew at this time, we're working on the emergency rehabilitation of the Latchford Bridge. In the town of Renfrew, we're working on the rehabilitation of the Hall Avenue trunk sanitary sewer. Those are just a couple of specific examples that are putting the people to work in the local community.

1120

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. A group of parents are sitting here in the members' gallery. They are here to tell me and others about their daily struggles and the barriers they face to care for their developmentally disabled adult children. The government promised to support these parents through programs like special services at home, the Passport initiative, and the innovative residential model initiative, but so far, these parents have been left out in the cold, just like so many parents across Ontario. Will this government explain to these parents why it has failed to assist them in their struggle to care for their own adult children?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I thank the member for his question.

I want to say to the parents, thank you for all of the work that you're doing with your children. I know that it's a very difficult task that you have.

This government is here to help these parents and these adult children who have developmental disabilities, yes, through different programs that this government has invested and continues to invest in. As part of the 2008 budget, we are investing \$15 million in one-time funding for capital projects to support community agencies and \$7 million for the developmental area. So we are provid-

ing money to open more beds for these individuals, more group homes, and to the Passport program we're investing money to help—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: This minister claims that the government has made it easy for families in crisis. She rhymes off programs as if they were actually doing something. These parents, like Leonard Neiberg and Petra Moore, who are here today, have been on waiting lists for these programs for years and they can't get to the top. And when they get near the top, the programs are cancelled.

Minister, parents are caring for their developmentally disabled adult children, and they're not getting what they deserve and have been promised over and over by your government. Will the minister please explain to Leonard and Petra why she has so grossly underfunded the services they need to assist them in caring for the disabled kids in their own home?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, let me correct a comment. There has been no program that has been cancelled. On the contrary, in 2005 this government started the Passport program, which was non-existent when this member and this party was in power. This Passport program was developed in 2005, and since 2005, we have invested over \$27 million in annualized funding, and we are helping more than 2,000 individuals. This program has been very successful.

We know that there are parents and children out there who are waiting for these services, and this government will continue to invest in these programs—special services at home, the Passport program—and to open new group homes for those who cannot stay at home.

SNOWMOBILING

Mr. Joe Dickson: My question is directed toward the Minister of Tourism.

Ontario is known for its year-round tourism experiences throughout the province and boasts a great deal to see and do, regardless of the season. However, as winter is slightly ahead of the official schedule, I believe that it's important to highlight some of the winter sports and activities our great province is known for. Snowmobiling, for example, is a pastime that is favoured throughout the province, and every year many Ontarians spend time exploring the extensive trail system that this province has to offer.

Most of my family—my wife and I, our children and their families—is involved in the snowmobiling community, acting as volunteers for trail maintenance and snowmobile trail wardens.

Snowmobiling is a great way to see the province for those who love—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I want to thank the member for Ajax-Pickering. I know he and his family are

very involved in the snowmobiling community, and it is a great community in our province.

Snowmobiling is an important part of the Ontario tourism industry, and as many in this House know—although not everyone knows—Ontario is the home of actually the most extensive network of snowmobile trails in the world, with over 40,000 kilometres of trails in all. Snowmobiling helps attract both international and domestic tourists to our province and generates close to \$1 billion in economic activity annually.

That is why our government has invested just over \$12 million over the last four years through the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs. This investment has allowed them to do substantial work on the trails and infrastructure, including trail rehabilitation, bridges and culverts, to really improve the product that we have—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Joe Dickson: Again to the Minister of Tourism: The minister has mentioned that the McGuinty government has invested almost \$12 million to maintain Ontario's trail network and to promote snowmobiling as a great outdoor tourism destination.

Some 38 years ago, my wife and I introduced our first child, Jimmy, at one year of age, to snowmobiling. He's still today enjoying snowmobiling weekly with all his friends.

It is important to note, when experiencing Ontario's great trail systems, that safety should be top of mind. Can the minister give this House more information about safety that is available to those who are involved in snowmobiling in this great province of Ontario?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas around this place, and I'm very excited to be talking about snowmobiling today, as the district of Nipissing is expecting another 15 or 20 centimetres. I know the county of Renfrew has lots of snow to welcome its snowmobilers as well.

At this time, it's important to encourage our snowmobilers to consider the safety aspects. Our lakes aren't yet frozen; it's time to be careful when we're out on the snowmobile trails. While we have lots of snow up north, we have to remember the safety is most important. The Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs offers a great deal of information on snowmobile safety. They have information around the importance of sober snowmobiling, open-water ice and lake safety, snow blindness, weather conditions, defensive snowmobiling, night riding and how to deal with hypothermia, frostbite and wind chill. I want to thank our partners in the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: My question is to the Premier. It's snowing in Ottawa right now, and it's expected to snow tomorrow. With talks already broken off, Ottawa's transit system will be paralyzed by a strike tomorrow, making it extremely difficult for 370,000 people

who take OC Transpo daily to get to work. Residents and visitors coming out of pre-Christmas celebrations will be looking for a way home so they don't have to drink and drive but will find no buses available.

In April this year, when the weather was much more hospitable, this Legislature met on Sunday to end a two-day Toronto Transit strike before people returned to work on Monday morning. Your labour minister then told the Legislature, "Most of us cannot afford to be away from work. Many cannot afford the costly alternatives to public transit."

What's good for Toronto is good for Ottawa. Premier, will you put a stop—

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to take the question. I'm concerned about this issue as it develops in my hometown, and I agree with the great majority of what my honourable colleague said. I certainly would encourage both sides to come together and to stay together and resolve this, particularly at this time of the year.

I must also say that the municipal transit authority in Ottawa is federally regulated since it is interprovincial. If there was going to be some imposed solution, that would have to come from the federal government, but we're more than prepared to lend whatever assistance and support we might. Our mediators, in particular, are eager to participate in this if we are invited to do so.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Back to the Premier: This Liberal government responded in less than 24 hours during the TTC strike with an emergency sitting of the Legislature, yet less than 24 hours from now, the ATU is threatening to strike in Ottawa.

Toronto is the financial capital of Canada, but we're strategically as important as the national seat of our Parliament. We are also twice the geographical size. We're—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Please continue.

1130

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appeal, as a suburban rural representative, to you because we are twice the geographical size of the city of Toronto. So I'm going to ask you, will your government commit to ensure there is no interruption of OC Transpo service in the national capital?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think if there is to be an appeal made here today, it would be an appeal made on behalf of all of us to both sides in Ottawa in our public transit system to come together and to find a way through this. There are thousands and thousands of people who rely on our public transit service and who have no alternative. I might also say that from the perspective of a retailer, it is especially important at this time of the year that folks be able to come into the downtown area or to wherever and do their shopping. Finally, I want to say to my colleague, again, if there is a request for a mediator, we are more than prepared to assist in doing whenever we might. But at the end of the day, any responsibility for an imposed solution has to come from the federal government because this is a federally regulated matter.

FOOD SAFETY

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is to the Premier. In the past year, Ontarians have experienced a listeriosis outbreak. More locally, in my riding, constituents are concerned about the safety of the milk that we drink. Yesterday, the auditor said the government needed to be more vigilant when its lab tests of meat and milk products detected possible sanitation concerns. With Ontarians increasingly concerned about the safety of our food, why is this government being so lax with meat and dairy producers and processors?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I would say that we certainly welcome the recommendations that the Provincial Auditor has provided to us. I would also reiterate, and it was recognized in the report, that our government has made some significant investments with respect to food safety.

With respect to the particular incidents that the member has referred to, I would say that our ministry has already taken action. We have shared that with some of the media that have called us on this, because food safety has been a priority for us. We will continue to consider the recommendations that have been made by the provincial auditor so that we can continue to move the yardstick for food safety in the province of Ontario forward. We have come a great distance and we will continue to work to implement a strong health and safety regulatory system for food in the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The auditor said, "A number of abattoirs and free-standing meat processors were found to have major and serious deficiencies," some at the rate of 30%. With dairy producers, licences were renewed before the inspections were even completed. With at least 15 Ontarians dead from the listeriosis outbreaks and residents in my community worried about the safety of the milk that they drink, when will this government act to ensure that all of Ontario's food is safe?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I would say to the honourable member that it has been this government that has acted to implement a regulatory regimen to ensure that our food is safe. While the Food Safety and Quality Act was passed in 2001, it was proclaimed in 2005, and our government has acted to implement those regulations. We have also put forward \$25 million to help those free-standing meat processors comply. In fact, one of your colleagues not so many months ago took our government to task for actually applying the new regulatory standard for free-standing meat processors and abattoirs. She called us butchers over here on this side of the House.

We are committed to implementing food safety regulations in the province of Ontario. We will continue to work with the Ontario Independent Meat Processors, with the Dairy Farmers of Ontario. We will pay very close attention to what the Provincial Auditor has highlighted, because—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just like to take this opportunity to welcome, in the members' gallery west, Bob Huget, the member from Sarnia in the 35th Parliament. Welcome back to Queen's Park today, Bob.

The time for question period has ended. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1135 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Again, I would like to introduce some friends who are visiting us today from the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance. They're here in the members' east gallery. I'm sure we all want to have the opportunity to go downstairs today, thank them for visiting the Legislature and pick up some of those great greenhouse veggies and poinsettias.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just like to welcome a couple of guests of mine in the Speaker's gallery, Scott Anderson and Wendy Farmer. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mrs. Julia Munro: Yesterday's report of the Auditor General pointed to continuing problems with the funding of children's mental health services in Ontario. Until last year, annual ministry funding increases have been minimal or non-existent. The government finally gave a 5% increase last year, but this barely made up for the zero you gave the year before. By giving minimal, across-the-board increases and providing funding for new initiatives without any needs assessments, you are creating inequities in funding. Children in high-growth areas are not getting the help they need.

Children's needs are increasing, and your government is not keeping up. The agencies delivering children's mental health services told the auditor that funding for their services is eroding. This continues to result in reduced services for children needing mental health support, particularly prevention and early intervention programs designed to reach children before their mental health issues are severe. Agencies have told me of these problems many times, and I am sure they have told the minister and the government the same.

We only want to know: When will the Minister of Children and Youth Services start to speak up and demand that the government give these programs for children the funding they need?

SAM BOUJI

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I rise in the House today to pay tribute to Mr. Sam Bouji, the CEO of the Global family

of financial companies. Mr. Bouji is a generous contributor to his community, the province and our country.

On November 30, Minister Takhar and I had the pleasure of attending Global's 10th anniversary celebrating that organization's growth and their commitment to communities and the country.

Sam Bouji is well known in many communities for his leadership, charisma and generosity. A large portion of his company's focus is on registered education savings plans that give many students affordable access to post-secondary education. Apart from the numerous donations he has made to community centres, hospitals and non-profit organizations, he was awarded the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal for his impact on education. Also, the different Global companies contribute to the financial stability of many Canadians. The Global Educational Marketing Corp. is what gives families the ability to plan for their children's education.

Sam Bouji has served our province and the country. For that, I wish him all the luck and all the success for his generosity, because he's always able and willing to give for others. Again, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for allowing me to do this statement.

TOBACCO CONTROL

Ms. Laurie Scott: Last Thursday, the opposition asked the Minister of Health Promotion what her ministry got in return for nearly 1.1 million taxpayers' dollars to the Liberal-friendly agency of Bensimon Byrne. She quoted some carefully spun statistics about banning smoking, but didn't answer the question. We asked why taxpayers have paid over \$14,000 per day for media-buying services—no answer. We've asked if she condones the teachers' union of Ontario and OPSEU pension plans investing over \$100 million into the largest tobacco company in the United States—no answer.

Yesterday, we heard the real story from the Auditor General, who tells us that the McQuinty Liberal tobacco policies are reaping wonderful rewards for the underground economy. Taxpayers are on the hook for over \$500 million in lost revenue to these illegal, underground tobacco products. The Liberals continue to punish hard-working, legitimate businesses and families, all the while ignoring the illegal smoke trade and allowing illicit products to be sold to Ontario's children, even on government-owned property.

The Minister of Health Promotion won't answer questions, but maybe she and her Liberal colleagues could explain why their lack of will to do the right thing has increased the consumption of untaxed tobacco products to where they've lost nearly 50% of the tobacco market.

Dalton McQuinty chooses to burden Ontario taxpayers with a \$500-million deficit instead of having the conviction to enforce the law.

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: This past Friday there was a coalition, a group, that met and had a press conference

here at Queen's Park. They were called the Colour of Poverty Campaign. They met the day after the Minister of Children and Youth Services released her report on poverty, and they wanted the Legislature to get the message that everything has not been looked at.

They had some very chilling statistics I would like to read into the record. Part of this is from Child Poverty in the GTA by the Children's Aid Society of Toronto.

"Poverty is racialized, that is, disproportionate to people of colour who are Canadian-born and newcomers. Among broad ethno-racial groups in the Toronto CMA, the 2000 LICO before-tax rates of child poverty were about:

"—one child in 10 in low income among global European groups;

"—one child in five for East Asian groups;

"—one child in four for aboriginal, South Asian, Caribbean, South and Central American groups;

"—one child in three for children of Arab and West Asian groups; and,

"—one child in two for children of African groups."

They were talking very seriously about what the minister had put forward in her program, and they were asking that we start to collect some very real statistics on this, because the face of child poverty is not just the face of the poor and the young children, it is increasingly a face of colour. They want this to be brought before the Legislature and for the Legislature to start taking a very clear look at this.

WINCHESTER DISTRICT MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Jim Brownell: Yesterday, we celebrated an important anniversary in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry. Sixty years ago, the Winchester District Memorial Hospital, one of three hospitals in my riding currently undergoing redevelopment, opened its doors.

This rural hospital in Dundas county has served the communities of Winchester and the surrounding area well since 1948. When the redevelopment is complete early next year, the hospital will be able to accommodate up to 30,000 emergency room patients annually.

I had the opportunity to tour the hospital recently and to see first-hand how the redevelopment project is progressing. I was very impressed with what I saw. As I said at the time, the new facility has a very efficient and effective layout plan, with new diagnostic equipment and improved patient care amenities. The hospital board, management and staff are building new partnerships with the Ottawa Hospital and the University of Ottawa Heart Institute. With this, my riding will soon have access to some of the best health care anywhere in Ontario.

I would like to thank the hospital's CEO, Trudy Reid; her team; the hospital board; and the communities of North Dundas and area for their dedication to this project. As Trudy Reid herself stated, "One of the amazing things here is the relationship we've built with the Ministry of Health."

I am proud to continue working with community partners and this government to foster real change and positive results for the people of Winchester and all of my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a sad day when you have to get up after the auditor's report—it's very thick; probably the largest report I've seen in my 10 or 15 years here. It was a scathing report on the government's inability to manage—and that's really what it said—in several distinct areas, not just the Highway Traffic Act, but certainly delivering special education, as one example. They've increased spending in that area by 52%, yet are only serving 5% more children with special needs. It's tragic.

There are other symptoms on the horizon for which the government really has no plan. When we're looking at an economy with over 250,000 jobs lost in manufacturing in your community and mine and no response from the government except to talk about bills—for instance, today we talked about a bill on the Coroners Act. We're also talking about two bills on the highway transportation act. These simply are not paying attention—they're dodging and weaving around the real issue of the economy and the jobs of Ontario.

We've had thousands of letters from dealers, parts manufacturers, as well as the auto assembly workers in my riding of Durham. It's a tragic time at this time of year that another 700 jobs were lost at General Motors—very sad. Bill 119 is the most recent bill, which passed an \$11,000 tax on small business. There simply is no plan, and yet the economy at this time of year—I don't see a single plan from the Premier of this province.

1510

RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I would like to acknowledge an important announcement that I had the pleasure of making this past Friday in my riding of Kitchener-Conestoga, on behalf of the Premier and the Honourable Leona Dombrowsky. This announcement was a partnership through the rural economic development program and J.T. Bakeries in Kitchener, which received a grant of \$492,000 through the Newdle project.

Premier McGuinty has articulated that this government fixed the roof while the sun was shining. This means that support of nearly half a million dollars is possible even in these difficult times.

Mike Farwell, the host of Farwell Live and 570 News talk radio, referred to this as a "good-news announcement." He acknowledged this as a "silver lining in these difficult times," and Mike Farwell is correct. What this grant means to my riding and to J.T. Bakeries is job stability for 200 existing jobs and job stability for 45 rural jobs.

I'd like to congratulate the partners in this project: Ray Franklin and John Zizzo, of J.T. Bakeries; Derek Jamieson, of New-Life Mills; and OMAFRA.

This grant allows us to look ahead into the future, to continue to be innovative, to continue to form partnerships such as co-op education with the high school across the street, and to continue to bring business and economic security to Kitchener-Conestoga and all of Ontario.

LANSDOWNE CHILDREN'S CENTRE

Mr. Dave Levac: On Sunday, December 7, I was able to join the record turnout of more than 480 children and parents who came out to participate in the 10th annual Lansdowne Children's Centre Christmas party in Brantford. Some of the activities included the Notre Dame Elementary School choir performance, cookie decorating, face painting, an obstacle course and crafting beautiful angels. The children were able to pet therapy dogs Haven and Lewis, under the watchful eye of Therapeutic Paws of Canada.

Of course, a special appearance by none other than Santa and Mrs. Claus was the highlight of the day. I got to have a photo taken with the famous Christmas couple.

To many of the children and families who depend on the programs and services of Lansdowne Children's Centre, the whole year's events culminated in this joyous year-end celebration.

The Lansdowne Children's Centre provides a safe, positive working environment for its clients and their parents and is like a second home for many. The staff at Lansdowne are simply fantastic.

It is a unique facility that provides in-house therapeutic services and specialists under one roof for children and youth with physical, communication and developmental needs. Indeed, we are very fortunate to have a facility like this in Brantford.

This event would not have been possible without the support and generosity of the rest of our community, including the Rotary Club of Brantford, Lansdowne staff and board, and their families and many volunteers, including the North Park Collegiate Interact Club.

For their unyielding efforts for the children of Lansdowne, I wish to offer my sincere appreciation and gratitude for all their hard work. Merry Christmas, Lansdowne Children's Centre. God bless.

Peace BY PEACE

Mr. Mike Colle: I rise in the House on behalf one of my constituents, Ms. Maygen Chapman, who is the York University campus director of an exceptional organization called Peace by PEACE.

Peace by PEACE is a not-for-profit, student-run organization at the University of Toronto and York University. Understanding the role that upstanding leaders can play in the lives of young people, Peace by PEACE is dedicated to educating kids in grades 4 through 6 about the benefits of conflict resolution.

Through the use of tireless and highly trained volunteers, the organization conducts role-playing scenarios,

win-win games and arts and crafts activities that challenge young people to deal with their life conflicts in a fun and peaceful way. Through the initiatives put forward by Peace by PEACE, we can feel secure that our future leaders of tomorrow will be equipped with the skills to deal with their problems in a friendly and efficient manner.

I would like to thank Ms. Chapman and her colleagues for their excellent efforts in promoting better communicators in my riding and in communities across Ontario. I ask that everyone in the House and in the province support this organization by visiting their online website and getting involved with this important initiative called Peace by PEACE.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move its adoption. I send it to you by way of page Swapnil.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 103, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and to make amendments to other Acts / *Projet de loi 103, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille et apportant des modifications à d'autres lois.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PROTECTION OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA PROTECTION DU DROIT À LA PARTICIPATION AUX AFFAIRES PUBLIQUES

Ms. Horwath moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 138, An Act to encourage participation in public debate, and dissuade persons from bringing legal proceedings or claims for an improper purpose / *Projet de loi 138, Loi visant à favoriser la participation aux affaires publiques et à empêcher l'introduction d'instances judiciaires ou de demandes dans un but illégitime.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This bill is in fact what is considered to be anti-SLAPP legislation in other jurisdictions. The bill protects persons from being subjected to legal proceedings that would stifle their ability to speak out on public issues or to promote, in the public interest, action by the public or by any level of government.

Provision is made in the bill for such legal proceedings to be dismissed at an early stage, for defendants subjected to such proceedings to be indemnified for the costs they incur in responding to those proceedings and for the court or tribunal to award additional damages to those defendants in appropriate circumstances. Communication or conduct constituting public participation is expressly designated as an occasion of qualified privilege in relation to all persons who become aware of that communication or conduct.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

AMENDMENT ACT

(TEMPORARY HELP AGENCIES), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI (AGENCES DE PLACEMENT TEMPORAIRE)

Mr. Fonseca moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 139, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in relation to temporary help agencies and certain other matters / *Projet de loi 139, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne les agences de placement temporaire et certaines autres questions.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I'll make a statement during ministerial statements.

SECURITIES AMENDMENT ACT (MUTUAL FUNDS), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES VALEURS MOBILIÈRES (FONDS MUTUELS)

Mr. Prue moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 140, An Act to amend the Securities Act with respect to mutual funds / *Projet de loi 140, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les valeurs mobilières à l'égard des fonds mutuels.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement?

Mr. Michael Prue: This bill amends the Securities Act to require mutual funds to establish and maintain an independent board of directors to oversee the activities of the mutual fund and the mutual fund manager, and to act in the best interests of the mutual fund and its security holders.

The bill also amends the act to require certain mutual fund advertisements to disclose the costs and fees charged by the fund to security holders, and to express the difference between the per cent total return of the fund and of the benchmark.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Speaker, on a point of order: I believe we have an agreement seeking unanimous consent for a 15-minute recess.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.
The House recessed from 1520 to 1536.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

TEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I'm pleased to introduce legislation that would amend the Employment Standards Act to enhance protections for employees working for temporary help agencies and help create opportunities for more temp employees to move to sustainable employment. I would like to give special thanks to my parliamentary assistant, Vic Dhillon, for his hard work.

A few decades ago, temporary help agencies provided workers for short-term clerical jobs. Today, agencies supply workers in a wide range of occupations, and an employee of an agency might be assigned to a single-client business for several months or even years. The nature of work may have changed, but our labour laws and regulations have lagged behind. Our intent is to ensure that Ontario's employment legislation reflects the realities of today's labour market in a balanced and fair way.

Before I outline the provisions of our proposed legislation, I'd like to inform the members of an amendment to a regulation under the Employment Standards Act. Our amended regulation has removed an exemption from public holiday pay that affected many temporary help agency employees. This will come into effect on January 2, 2009. Temp agency employees will have the same rights to public holiday entitlements as other employees in Ontario. If our proposed legislation passes, we intend to make another regulation on royal assent, this time removing the exemptions around termination and severance that affect many temp agency employees.

I will now outline some of the major elements of our proposed legislation. Many people working for temp agencies face barriers to permanent employment. Our approach would remove some of the barriers they may

face, allowing them to seize opportunities if they should arise. If our proposed legislation passes, temporary help agencies would be prohibited from preventing a client from hiring an agency's assignment employee, charging the client a temporary to permanent fee after six months or more have passed since the employee was first assigned to the client; agencies would also be prohibited from charging assignment employees certain fees, including: a fee for taking permanent employment with a client, a fee for becoming an assignment employee, a fee for assistance in finding work with a client or a fee for assistance in preparing a resumé or preparing for job interviews. Since agencies are receiving fees from clients, there is no good reason for them to double-dip and also demand a fee from the employee. It's not right and it's not fair. We want to put an end to this practice.

We would also require agencies to provide the employees, in writing, with the agency's name, contact information and information sheet on the employee's rights. They would also be required to provide in writing the client's name and contact information as well as the wages, benefits, hours of work and pay schedule associated with the assignment and a general description of the work to be performed for the client.

Our proposed legislation would also prohibit clients of agencies from engaging in reprisals against assignment employees for asserting their rights.

1540

Our proposed legislation supports Ontario's poverty reduction strategy, as it is designed to create more opportunities and build a stronger economy. It would put an end to unscrupulous agencies that take advantage of and exploit vulnerable workers.

I believe we have a fair and balanced proposal before the House, and I urge all members to support it.

In closing, I would like to thank all the people who participated in our consultations and whose proposals form the basis of our legislation. Some of them are with us here today: Deena Ladd and her members from the Workers' Action Centre, and Mary Gellatly from Parkdale Community Legal Services, and some of her members. I thank them very much.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Statements by the ministry? Responses?

TEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'm rising today on behalf of the official opposition to respond to the Minister of Labour's announcement of a few minutes ago regarding changes to the Employment Standards Act, and also changes to some of the regulations regarding temporary workers.

In general, we are supportive of the government's efforts to offer protection to workers in temporary agencies, and look forward to the debate on this bill. However, we do have concerns about some of the unintended consequences of the government's announcements. First, I would have to wonder why the government would announce changes to the regulations today, December 9,

that do not come into effect until January 2. It seems to me that there are going to be many temporary workers who are going to expect to be paid for Christmas and other holidays, and are going to be out of luck. You can't tell me that the extra week is going to make a difference, and whether temporary agencies are ready to pay for these statutory holidays or not. What I think this is going to do is create a lot of confusion for temporary workers and their employers.

The other question I have is, does the government know how much these changes are going to cost temporary agencies and, in turn, their clients? Has the government done the cost analysis that they should have done before they introduced this bill and these regulatory changes? Or have they simply decided upon a course of action without doing their homework, like with their recent bill on the WSIB, Bill 119?

It's also interesting to point out that the temporary workers hired for this very government were not allowed to apply for permanent jobs. This government itself refused to afford them the rights that they now wish to include in this bill. So I would certainly hope that the government will remove barriers for temporary workers within our own government of Ontario as well as elsewhere.

While we will work with the government on protecting temporary workers, we also think it is important not to demonize the good temporary agencies that are out there. If you look at the increase in the number of temporary workers today, you can see how that has become an option which businesses are now turning to for staffing solutions. I am sure that there are many good temporary agencies out there, and there are also good employers. Yet, the government hasn't mentioned them here today, but instead it lumps all of these businesses in with the bad apples that do exist.

On our side of the House, we hope that the government will listen to industry associations and also work with them on relieving some of their anxiety over these changes announced today. I know that the minister has a reputation of consulting with groups impacted by government decisions, but also has not taken the time to deal with those industry groups that are affected, for example, in Bill 119. However, I hope that he will turn over a new leaf, listen to this industry and try to come to a compromise that can see the industry continue to be successful, and for the betterment of all Ontario workers.

TEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: If there has been progress today made by our friends on the other side, it's certainly due to the incredible work that has been done by Workers' Action Centre—Deena Ladd and Mary Gellatly; and not only Workers' Action Centre but the Ontario Federation of Labour, Toronto and York Region Labour Council, and CLC with their Good Jobs Summit and the thousands of members that were there. Certainly a great deal of work has gone into this. We in the New Democratic Party

would have liked to see a quantum leap rather than a baby step. What we see here is a baby step.

In fact, when I used to work in the agency business, back in pre-Harris days, there were no fees allowed to be charged to applicants after six months. Those who were working on a temporary basis for most of the larger agencies were not charged, or the client companies were not charged an extra fee for taking them on permanently. So only with this government would a step backward be a step forward.

What we need, and we need incredible action and we need it soon, is for the almost one in two Ontarians who work in precarious employment, for the 700,000 Ontarians who work through temp agencies. Almost 10% of the workforce works through temp agencies. This is astronomical; this is frightening. Most people work in precarious employment.

So when you look at CUPE 3903, who are on strike at York University, you have people with Ph.Ds. reapplying for their jobs every single year, and this will not help them at all. When you look at janitors who are being forced to take out their own incorporation papers and become client companies de facto and earn under minimum wage—because they really are workers even though they are called contractors—certainly SEIU and Justice for Janitors, this will not help them at all. For all of those who aren't working through temporary agencies, this will not help them at all.

Will it help collect holiday pay? Yes, it will. That's a good thing. Will it stop some of the most egregious offences of temporary agencies? Yes, it will.

But what do we want in the New Democratic Party? What do all socially conscious workers and activists want? We want equal pay for equal work. Tomorrow is the day that we celebrate, around the world, human rights. It is a human right to have equal pay for equal work. This bill does not give workers equal pay for equal work. You could be a temp working in accounts payable sitting right next to somebody who is earning \$15 an hour while you're earning \$12. This bill will not help that worker. That worker in that accounts payable job will still be paid \$3 less than the full-time worker. That university professor working on contract will still make less.

What else do we want? We want pay equity. Women make 71 cents for every dollar that men make in this province, and the equity commission has been calling for absolute funding for what they need so that they can actually enforce the law that is now 20 years old. It's not in force. This baby step will not help with pay equity.

It will not help with the living wage. We do not have a living wage in this province. If you are making minimum wage, you are not able to live above the poverty line. If this government was serious about its anti-poverty measures, the first thing it would do would be to raise the minimum wage to at least \$10.25 right now. That's the poverty line.

Of course, there's the question of enforcement. I just received the bill; I haven't yet read the fine print, so we don't know if there is a poison pill in here, but we want

to know about enforcement. We want to know if there are going to be adequate fines for breaking this law. Also, we want to see this law enforced.

We in the New Democratic Party want to sit next week, and we want to debate this bill and pass this bill this session. We don't want to wait a month, maybe two, maybe three, to see this bill come to pass. We want to pass it now. If this government was interested in workers' rights, they would want to see it passed now too, and wouldn't prorogue this House without passing it. Instead of taking a two-month vacation when workers don't get one, why don't we come back next week, work hard, pass this bill and see, as the member just said, that these workers get their Christmas pay and these workers get the justice that's due them?

This is certainly an equal playing field for temporary agencies. What we want to see is an equal playing field for all workers—equal pay for equal work—and let's pass this immediately.

Thank you, Workers' Action, for coming out and thank you for all your hard work.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Our guests are always welcome to the Legislature. We certainly allow you to observe, but we ask that you not participate.

PETITIONS

LOGGING ROUTE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with logging in the village of Restoule. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Nipissing forest management plan proposes to use Hawthorne Drive in Restoule, which features a single-lane bridge and narrow and steep sections; and

"Whereas area residents have grave concerns about community safety, traffic speed, truck noise and general wear and tear of Hawthorne Drive and the bridge in the village of Restoule; and

"Whereas the proposed route travels past the Restoule Canadian Legion and two churches; and

"Whereas alternate routes are possible via Odorizzi Road and Block 09-056;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety and concerns of the people of Restoule ahead of logging interests and ensure an alternate route is selected for the Nipissing forest management plan."

I support this petition.

FOCUS COMMUNITY PROGRAM

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm reading a petition from Focus Community program.

"Whereas the Focus Community program has been effectively working with communities across Ontario for the health of Ontarians by preventing injury and harm in relation to drug and alcohol use since 1991; and

"Whereas the Focus Community program funding cycle ended on March 31, 2008, and the project's extension funding will end on March 31, 2009; and

"Whereas the Focus Community program has been waiting for a decision from the Ministry of Health Promotion about continued funding. Without a decision, the Focus Community program cannot make plans, develop a budget, or make commitments with community partners;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health Promotion renew the funding of the Focus Community program for an extended period so that they can continue the good work they have been providing for the past 17 years."

I certainly agree with this and will affix my signature and give it to Zac to deliver.

INTERPROVINCIAL BRIDGE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas ROCHE-NCE, a consulting firm hired to study potential sites for an interprovincial crossing between Ottawa and Gatineau, is recommending that an interprovincial bridge across the Ottawa River be built at Kettle Island, connecting to the scenic Aviation Parkway in Ottawa, turning it into a four-lane commuter and truck route passing through downtown residential communities. Along the proposed routes are homes, seniors' apartments, schools, parks, the Montfort long-term-care facility and the Montfort Hospital, all of which will be severely impacted by noise, vibration and disease-causing air pollution. A truck and commuter route through neighbourhoods is a safety issue because of the increased risk of pedestrians and cyclists and the transport of hazardous materials, and there are other, more suitable corridors further east, outside of the downtown core, which would have minimal impact on Ottawa residents;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To reject the recommendation of a bridge at Kettle Island and to select a more suitable corridor to proceed to phase two of the interprovincial crossings environmental assessment study."

I affix my signature to this petition and send it to the table via page Jacqueline.

SERVICES FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

Mr. Robert Bailey: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care funds the school health support service through community care access centres across this province for

children with special needs who require physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech-language therapy in public schools and in private and home schools; and

"Whereas the Minister of Children and Youth Services envisions an Ontario where all children and youth have the best opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential; and....

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately transfer funding and responsibility for this delivery of school health support service to school-aged children with complex and multiple disabilities from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and community access care centres to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services."

I agree with this petition and will sign it and send it down to the table with Samantha.

FOCUS COMMUNITY PROGRAM

Mr. Howard Hampton: I have a petition and it reads:

"Whereas the Focus Community program has been effectively working with communities across Ontario for the health of Ontarians by preventing injury and harm in relation to drug and alcohol use since 1991; and

"Whereas the Focus Community program funding cycle ended on March 31, 2008, and the project's extension funding will end on March 31, 2009; and

"Whereas the Focus Community program has been waiting for a decision from the Ministry of Health Promotion about continued funding. Without a decision, the Focus Community program cannot make plans, develop a budget, or make commitments with community partners;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health Promotion renew the funding of the Focus Community program for an extended period so that they can continue the good work they have been providing for the past 17 years."

This has been signed by literally hundreds of residents from across northern Ontario, and I—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Petitions? The member for Mississauga—Streetsville.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, I'm so disappointed that you have to look it up. Maybe I should stand up more often.

I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and I'd like to thank Susan O'Neill of Osprey Boulevard in Lisgar for having collected the signatures. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the

ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I'm pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Amanda to carry it for me.

BEER RETAILING AND DISTRIBUTION

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of the member from Halton, Mr. Chudleigh. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the current system, practice and arrangement of retailing and distributing beer in the province of Ontario—and more specifically, the 'near monopoly' of The Beer Store—severely restricts the accessibility, convenience and choice for" all "retail consumers of beer in Ontario; and

"Whereas The Beer Store 'near monopoly' is controlled by 'for-profit, foreign-owned companies' and these companies are not accountable to the people of Ontario, and these companies do not act in the best interests of the people of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That legislation be introduced that will permit the retailing and distribution of beer through alternative and additional grocery and supermarket retail channels that will fairly compete with The Beer Store," the near monopoly, "thereby allowing an accessible, convenient, safe, well-regulated and environmentally responsible retailing environment for beer to become established in the province of Ontario."

I'm pleased to sign this and submit it with Bradyn.

TOM LONGBOAT

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition to recognize Tom Longboat Day in Ontario.

"Whereas Tom Longboat, a proud son of the Onondaga Nation" in the city of Brantford "was one of the most internationally celebrated athletes in Canadian history;

"Whereas Tom Longboat was voted athlete of the 20th century by Maclean's magazine for his record-breaking marathon and long-distance triumphs against the world's best;

"Whereas Tom Longboat fought for his country in World War I and was wounded twice during his tour of duty;

"Whereas Tom Longboat is a proud symbol of the outstanding achievements and contributions of Canada's aboriginal people;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario."

I support this petition and I affix my name to it.

HEALTH CARD RENEWAL CLINIC

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to present the latest batch of petitions to bring health card renewal services closer to Glanbrook residents. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas seniors, the disabled, families with young children and other Mount Hope and Binbrook residents are forced to drive to downtown Hamilton to renew their Ontario health cards; and

"Whereas the province of Ontario mandates that health cards be renewed on a regular basis and that an Ontario health card must be presented to receive OHIP health services; and

"Whereas the Dalton McGuinty government has increased taxes and fees on local residents but has not improved services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work with the Ontario Ministry of Health to bring a mobile health card renewal clinic to the Mount Hope and Binbrook area so that residents can more readily renew their Ontario health cards without the drive to downtown Hamilton."

I assign my signature in support.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly on behalf of the western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre.

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery

centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I give this to page Sahara and put my signature to it.

1600

DRIVER LICENCES

Mr. Toby Barrett: These petitions are titled "Delhi Wants Its MTO Office Back."

"To the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas the community of Delhi has historically had a driver's licence issuing office; and

"Whereas the current government set out a request for proposal for a new operator of a driver's licence issuing office in Delhi;

"Whereas many individuals in the town of Delhi responded to the RFP and paid \$68 in application fees to the Ontario government; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government, after collecting this money from Delhi citizens, has decided against reopening an issuing office in Delhi;

"Whereas the residents of Delhi are currently being forced to drive 20 kilometres to the nearest issuing office;

"We, the undersigned, demand the McGuinty government revisit the proposals already received and reopen an office to meet the needs of residents within the community."

I went door-to-door to get some of these petitions and I'll affix my name to it.

FOCUS COMMUNITY PROGRAM

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Petitions? The member for Niagara.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Niagara, Welland—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Welland.

Mr. Peter Kormos: —Welland—Thorold, old Mel Swart's former riding.

I have a petition that reads:

"Whereas the Focus Community program has been effectively working with communities across Ontario for the health of Ontarians by preventing injury and harm in relation to drug and alcohol use since 1991; and

"Whereas the Focus Community program funding cycle ended on March 31, 2008, and the project's extension funding will end on March 31, 2009; and

"Whereas the Focus Community program has been waiting for a decision from the Ministry of Health Promotion about continued funding. Without a decision, the Focus Community program cannot make plans, develop a budget or make commitments with community partners;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health Promotion renew the funding of the Focus Community program for an ex-

tended period so they can continue the good work they have been providing for the past 17 years.”

Thousands of signatures, many from Niagara region, Welland and Port Colborne included, and I have affixed my signature as well.

BATHURST HEIGHTS ADULT LEARNING CENTRE

Mr. Mike Colle: I have more petitions from the people of the Bathurst Heights learning centre, the ESL learning centre.

“Whereas the growing number”—

Oh, that’s the wrong one. Wait a minute. Here it is.

“Whereas there are over 2,000 adult ESL students being served by the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre, operated by the Toronto District School Board, in partnership with the province of Ontario;

“Whereas this is the only English as a second language (ESL) learning centre in this area of the city located directly on the Spadina subway line, making it accessible for students across the city;

“Whereas newcomers in Toronto, and in the Lawrence Heights area, need the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre so they can succeed in their career opportunities;

“Whereas the proposed revitalization of Lawrence Heights threatens the existence of the centre;

“Therefore we, the undersigned,” request “that any revitalization of Lawrence Heights include a newcomer centre and ensure that the Bathurst Heights centre continues to exist in the present location.”

I support this petition and I affix my name to it.

MOTORCYCLE SAFETY

Mr. Robert Bailey: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Bill 117, presented by MPP Helena Jaczek on October 27, 2008, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the driving and operation of motorcycles with child passengers” so that no passenger “shall drive or operate a motorcycle on a highway if another person under the age of 14 years is a passenger...;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That Bill 117 be removed from the agenda and never become law.”

There are hundreds of petitions here. I’ll affix my name to this one and send it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I believe we have unanimous consent to move a motion respecting concurrence.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Tourism is seeking unanimous consent of the House to move a motion with respect to concurrences in supply. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: That the orders for concurrence and supply for the various ministries, as represented by government orders 14 through 25, inclusive, be called and debated concurrently, and

That the time available to 5:50 p.m. be divided equally among the recognized parties, at which time the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of each order for concurrence, and

That any required divisions on any of the orders for concurrence in supply shall be deferred to deferred votes, such votes to be taken in succession with one five-minute bell.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

CONCURRENCE IN SUPPLY

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): Government order 14, concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade;

Government order 15, concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs;

Government order 16, concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care;

Government order 17, concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines;

Government order 18, concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Research and Innovation;

Government order 19, concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Labour;

Government order 20, concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs;

Government order 21, concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Finance;

Government order 22, concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities;

Government order 23, concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Energy;

Government order 24, concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal;

Government order 25, concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Pickering—no, Scarborough—Pickering.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Pickering—Scarborough East.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pickering—Scarborough East.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Thank you, Speaker. I was actually having some fun with that. I know that often ridings with multiple names make it confusing, particularly when they cross boundaries. I was going to suggest that I change the name of my riding to Toronto—Durham, but I had a discussion at the Toronto caucus meeting and

they weren't really that keen on the idea, nor was my friend across the floor from Ajax-Pickering in Durham. I didn't even have the chance to debate it with the actual member from Durham, within Durham region, so I guess I'll have to stay, at least for the time being, with Pickering-Scarborough East as the riding.

Interjection.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: "Toronto-Durham" sort of encapsulated a larger geography, but I know that Toronto caucus members weren't quite as keen on the idea.

It's a pleasure today to be able to speak to the concurrence motion. It is an opportunity, in part, to speak to some of the activities, accomplishments and initiatives of our government. It's a chance to speak, at least briefly, on some of the initiatives that have come out of government over a period of time as we've built on a program of success in the province of Ontario, and in some parts a good opportunity as well to speak to how the initiatives of the government and of the 2008-09 budget have, to some extent, sort of foreseen the economic climate in which we find ourselves now, and how some of those decisions are helping to, at the very least, mitigate some of the impacts that would otherwise be upon us, despite the things that are happening out there in the economy at this point in time.

The initiatives of the McGuinty government since 2003 through to now in the areas of health—not to exclude the initiatives in any way of the concurrent fiscal year, the 2008-09 budget year—have been one of the key focuses on improving access to health care within the province of Ontario. There are literally dozens of projects—100 plus—that have either been initiated, completed, are operational, are currently in the process of construction or are on the books and committed for that type of initiative. I can reference those in particular in my own riding that serve the constituents of my riding, whether it be the Ajax-Pickering site of the Rouge Valley Health System or the Centenary site. Both of those have seen the benefit of construction for renewal and enhancement, which is going to provide an improved level of health care for my constituents at both of those sites, but in doing that have at the same time also provided a window of opportunity for significant public investment.

With that public investment has come a tremendous number of construction-related jobs currently, not to speak of the need to do the planning and initiatives to actually equip those facilities when the time comes and provide the staffing that will be necessary to use those facilities and that equipment to provide the quality of health care that one needs.

1610

I had the opportunity in the past few weeks, along with member from Ajax-Pickering, to visit the Ajax site currently under construction that exists within his riding, which serves particularly the constituents in our two ridings, to see the work that is being done by those construction crews at this point in time and get a real sense of the renewal, expansion and opportunities that exist in that particular facility and, as the work is completed, how

it's going to serve our constituents well with the tens of millions of dollars that are being invested, some of which obviously are flowing through this particular budget year as part of the process in which members, through estimates, had a chance to query various ministries on their initiatives.

Health-related projects are helping to prop up our economy at this point in time, keeping people in the workforce, doing the planning necessary to equip those facilities as they come on stream and providing opportunities for long-term employment of skilled people within the province of Ontario to actually provide the necessary services that so many families want and look toward.

There are a number of other things we have focused on over time; these types of initiatives that are going to help. The shortening of wait times: We launched those initiatives and made those transparent, so the public can see exactly what we've been doing in regard to shortening of wait times, and can assess and measure those and find opportunities to take advantage of that.

We have taken particular initiatives in the areas of promoting health and preventing illness. The smoke-free Ontario initiatives have very aggressively set out opportunities to reduce smoking within the province of Ontario. I think we're seeing, as time goes on, the type of success that is having as more and more people move away from the use of tobacco in this province. It doesn't come easily and it doesn't come quickly, but it's part of the ongoing initiatives and investments that governments make when they set out a series of priorities and work toward seeing those priorities actually put in place.

The 2008-09 budget proposed an investment of some \$40.5 billion in Ontario's health care sector. That's an increase of over \$11 billion since the 2003-04 time frame, more than a one-third increase in investment in health care in this province. We're seeing the changes that that type of investment brings about in the province of Ontario. We're seeing people who are healthier, people who are taking their health more conscientiously, people who are getting access to health care in a quicker and more effective fashion. We're seeing the types of analysis and diagnosis that we weren't seeing four and five years ago and people being treated for illnesses that are occurring.

We committed to things like providing additional personal support workers in long-term-care facilities. That's an area that's so critically important to continue to invest in as well, and this budget document provided for that. All of us in this place want to ensure as best as we can that the seniors in our communities have the type of support and dignity that come with age. Sometimes that can be accommodated in a home setting. At other times, it requires that people to move into long-term-care home settings, where there's a higher level of support than might be available with family, friends or neighbours, and care that the individual might not be able to provide for themselves.

Having those additional support workers available to them in those settings provides for that dignity, that

quality of life that seniors have worked so hard and so dearly earned in the province of Ontario. Our investments in the 2008-09 budget and the ongoing initiatives since we took office are helping to establish a framework where seniors have that dignity as they move through the latter stages of life, when their care needs become even greater.

Among the chronic disease areas of prevention and management strategies that one needs to look at, I recall the early debates in my limited tenure in this place, through private members' bills, when we talked about and had private members' support from all sides of this House for insulin pumps. Over time, that initiative was adopted. Initially, the youth in this community were eligible for insulin pumps, and now that's being extended into the adult community as well.

I had the opportunity just in the past week to be speaking with a constituent whose son was diagnosed as a diabetic in his early youth, at 11 or 12 years old, and now that he's in his late 20s he is eligible to have an insulin pump strategy and is going through, I understand, a very rigorous process to establish whether or not he is a suitable candidate. It's not that everyone is necessarily eligible for this type of treatment, but the capacity to have it there is so important because it will—if this individual finds that he's able to be a good candidate for the insulin pump—normalize his life in a fashion that he hasn't had over so many years. So these are important investments and important initiatives. Sometimes they come from government, and sometimes they come right out of this place, from individual members on each and every side of the House with good ideas that end up in debate and become part of the strategy, ultimately, of government, and result in the kinds of investments that will improve health care throughout the province of Ontario.

The government in this particular budgetary cycle—part of the debate that has gone on—has committed some \$120 million, to be spent over the next three years for hospitals in high-growth and high-population areas, to meet the demands of that growth. We hear petitions on a very regular basis. The member from Mississauga-Streetsville—I checked to be sure it's Mr. Delaney's riding—who was just on his feet not that long ago, has a series of petitions and he reads them pretty regularly. He even gets some support from other members to read them, about the needs of health care in his community, a high-growth area within the province of Ontario. He likes to bring that to our attention on a regular basis. A commitment of over \$120 million over three years for those high-growth communities will certainly help to alleviate some of the stressors that are occurring there. Through the LHIN structure, those monies will be dispensed, within those communities, to those hospitals to provide the levels of care that we would all want to see, and put some emphasis on high-growth areas within the province of Ontario.

We made a commitment to extending, to nursing graduates, opportunities for full-time employment, which had a tremendous uptake in and of itself. We don't want

highly trained, skilled people—nurses that we so desperately need in this province—to leave. We don't want them to leave because they can't find the type of employment and structure that they need, either as individuals to have the lifestyle they want, or to support families as part of a family structure. We don't want them to leave the province. We want them to have the opportunity to work and build careers right here. That's the commitment and initiative to full-time employment for new nursing graduates, so that they wouldn't look to other jurisdictions for places of employment. They would look right here in their own province, in their own communities, in their own hometowns, serving constituents, family, friends, neighbours that they would have met over the years and serving them in their local hospitals on a full-time basis.

The investments continue, particularly in the health care area. Obviously, when you're spending \$40 billion, a very significant amount of a provincial budget, and certainly when you look at a \$90-billion-plus budget, you're over the 40% mark; you're in the range of 45% of your budget going to provide service and health care in the province of Ontario to our collective constituents. Those investments are spread around, obviously, a huge, huge number of areas as each of us uses, our families use and touch base with and are affected by—the need for health care, everything from emergencies that we have very unexpectedly occurring to us or to our families, when the system has to be there to support us through birth, throughout our life, through chronic diseases, through acute disease, through to the long-term care and the ultimate ending of our lives when, in many cases, we find ourselves in care of either our hospital structures or our long-term-care structures.

One of the initiatives that governments, over a period of time, have invested in and continue to invest in are strategies around electronic health and electric health systems. We're now referring to it as eHealth Ontario; it has other names at other times. We need to continue those investments. We need to build upon the work that has been done in the past, and this year's budget is doing that as the budget year continues. We're continuing those investments in eHealth strategies, ideally so that one of these days we'll have an eHealth record that will track us. We'll have something that our physician will be able to call up and gain access to, that he or she will be able to readily transmit electronically to other health care provider systems. They'll be able to access our records, and you and I won't find ourselves going to our family doctor and being sent off, as we have to be anyway, for an X-ray, as the case might be, and then picking up the hard copy and delivering it to the hospital. There will be in place a much better structure for that to occur through the eHealth-related systems as the skills and the technology improves, and as our capacity to bring those elements together and protect the individual's privacy, which is always one of the key elements of this discussion. But to continue that process, whether it's on the individual basis for our own individual records or whether it's the lab information that needs to be moved or the drug infor-

mation that needs to be moved around, it's critically important to our investments on a go-forward basis. We're making, have been making and continue to make significant investments in the health care system in the province of Ontario, and this year, 2008-09, has been no different than any other year in that regard.

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We need to continue, as a province and as a government, to invest in various sectors of our province, not the least of which are our rural and northern communities. Part of our investment structure this year has been to ensure that some priority is given to our rural and northern communities within the province of Ontario. We committed some \$450 million during this budgetary cycle in municipal infrastructure for priority municipal capital projects. It includes some \$400 million for municipal roads and bridges in communities outside of Toronto. People often think of Toronto as being something of the centre. As we sit here and do our work here, it's quite easy for us to get caught up in the Toronto area, particularly for those of us who live within the Golden Horseshoe area and see this as more of the centre. I think it's important for the members around here and for government in structuring budgets to keep a very keen eye on the rest of the province of Ontario and those small municipalities. I know that members throughout this House hold the feet of government to the fire in question periods and other times as they query the ministers to ensure that the ministers and government don't forget the importance of rural Ontario and don't allow oversight in that fashion to forget about the importance of our rural communities.

Among the types of strategies that were put in place in this budgetary cycle to support our ongoing initiatives are things like the new distance grant for post-secondary education to assist with travel costs for those who live in distant parts of the province of Ontario to be able to get to the places they want to and who are eligible to attend a school to enhance their education, to build upon things like the Reaching Higher plan to ensure that young people in particular have opportunities for post-secondary education. We want to ensure that there's reasonable access for all Ontarians to that, and thus the inclusion of a new distance grant is an important part of that process.

We looked at the province of Ontario, we looked at more remote parts of province, areas that are of particular interest to us. We looked at areas like Thunder Bay for new research and innovation opportunities in the bio-economy, focusing on forestry, which is an area where we've had considerable debate in this House as it struggles. We committed some \$25 million to create in Thunder Bay the Centre for Research and Innovation. We took a look at places like Sault Ste. Marie and determined that a \$15-million investment there to support the establishment of the Centre for Invasive Alien Species Management was a good investment for the province of Ontario, but equally a good investment for the community of Sault Ste. Marie and that part of northern Ontario.

We've committed to \$30 million over four years to enhance broadband access in rural areas in southern

Ontario. All of these investments aren't in the north; there certainly are a lot of areas in southern Ontario that are distinctly rural and that need our continued support, and certainly broadband is one of those. If we are to continue to move into the new economies, the economies that we will see emerging following the current economic downturn, we're going to need to be on top of the technology that allows us to communicate more effectively. There's no more reason that someone in a rural community shouldn't have access to broadband, if one can put in it place, than anyone in an urban community. There's no more reason that a person in a rural southern Ontario community shouldn't have the opportunity to conduct their business in a fast, effective and efficient fashion when it demands of them access to that technology than someone living in a large urban centre. The investments that we're making in broadband are going to serve us well, not only in the coming year, two years, five years, but they will serve us well in the next generation of work within the province of Ontario, and I would hope and expect that we'll continue those types of investments as we move forward.

We need to continue investing in the business climate, in the tax climate, and that's the reason why our business education tax reductions were accelerated in northern Ontario. We recognize the 30,000 businesses in some 85 northern municipalities are meeting their own issues, their own constraints. They've been faced with what we're facing in other parts of the province, probably earlier. We recognize the need to expedite our efforts on reducing business education taxes in those communities at an earlier stage, as a way to support those businesses. These will be good investments, some \$70 million over three years in savings, as a result of this acceleration of the business education tax in those northern communities.

There are any number of initiatives the government has undertaken. I know that during estimates there were opportunities in that standing committee for members from all sides of the House to query government, query ministers, particularly as chosen by each of the parties, on what they put before this House, what they included in their budget, and whether or not those things are meeting the priorities within the province of Ontario.

I had the chance, during my early couple of years in this place, to sit on estimates. I had the opportunity then to hear from ministers in many of the ministries over those two or three years—not necessarily each and every one of them, as they're restricted annually. It certainly gives you the opportunity in that process, as they complete that work and report back to this Legislature, to understand the depth of knowledge not only that they have to acquire as ministers in their ministry in respect to their budget, but also the expertise that has been built in this large enterprise, the government of the province of Ontario, the public service, the deputy ministers, the assistant deputy ministers, those managers and directors who have specific responsibilities, and how intently involved they are in ensuring that the dollars that are

provided to them or through them to the people of the province of Ontario—that they have responsibility for how seriously they take their work, how dedicated they are to getting that work done well and to ensuring the dollars spent are dollars spent in an effective fashion on behalf of the constituents. The public service, in that regard, is to be commended and should be commended on a regular basis for the work that they do on behalf of the constituents of the province of Ontario, and on behalf of this legislation, particularly on behalf of the government of the day, whoever that government might be.

I'm pleased that I have had a few minutes to speak on the matter of concurrence today. I'm looking forward to the vote that we will have later today on the agreement that exists for the sharing of time amongst all the three parties. We look forward, certainly those of us in the House who are going to be most directly engaged in the development of the next round of the budgets—and I see members from each side who will be participating in our pre-budget consultations as the legislative committee that will re-engage again this Thursday for the third day in the city of Toronto. Next week, we'll be travelling throughout the province of Ontario to hear from folks about what their priorities are as individuals and organizations in the current economic climate.

We have to continue to invest in this province. We have to continue to keep focused on priorities in the province, and this is an important part of that process, to ensure that we have an opportunity to speak to what's transpiring in the province at this point in time, to ensure that we're spending the tax dollars of the people of the province in a wise and judicious fashion, based on what their priorities are within the province.

It has been a pleasure. I just had a few minutes in respect to the concurrence motion, and I look forward to continuing the debate today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: As we debate supply and concurrences, I wish to touch on a number of financial issues, ranging from this government's lack of ability to deal with the financial decline that we're now seeing—a financial decline that this government has been warned about for the past year or so—to its inability to step up to the plate for the auto sector that's bleeding jobs and revenue.

I wish to touch on this government's refusal to enforce tobacco tax laws. I know concurrences also deals with, obviously, finance and the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs. You don't enforce those laws, and we've now got a reading from the Auditor General: It has put us \$500 million in the hole. That's just what can be measured. I'm not sure what public servant is willing to go out to some of the native communities and actually do an accurate measurement. We've got a reading of half a billion dollars in the hole. It may well be \$1 billion in lost tax revenues; nobody really knows. With this government's continued lack of action, that particular hole is really becoming a bottomless pit in which we find our-

selves now labelled as a have-not province, with no plan to get out.

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Clearly, as we consider supply and concurrences, we're talking about dealing with the allocation of scarce resources, and a number of questions emerge: To what extent do we allow this government, while the House is not in session, to continue on its path of spending, a path that we now see written in red ink? To what extent do we allow government to continue unchecked while employers across the province are being forced to cut jobs, cut back, close their doors in many cases, because of the brutal economic climate within the province of Ontario?

There has been close to five years of government action now against tobacco farmers in my area—jacking up taxes—coupled with lack of action with respect to other farm commodities. I think of hogs, beef, horticultural crops.

More recently, and this would be going back now two and a half years, the land dispute crisis has pretty well knocked the feet out from under the economy in my riding, particularly in Haldimand county and in the neighbouring government-held riding, the riding of Brant, in Brantford.

Now, due in large part to lack of a proper plan, a failure to read the signs and a tax-and-spend-more-and-more mentality, the rest of the province has caught up with my riding. The rest of this province is pretty well on the ropes. There are not many taxpayers out there who would be pleased to see this government walk away from the House in the new year and continue on the current path of spending, especially with the Ontario economy crumbling around us.

I do hear government members cry, "It's not our fault. Much of the developed world is in the same pickle." But we do see our country, Canada, is rolling with the punches; in Ontario, we're taking it right in the teeth. I can attest for Norfolk county and Haldimand county: They have been kicked in the teeth in the last several years. Look at the numbers: Canada lost 71,000 jobs in November; the fact is 66,000 of those jobs used to be in Ontario. Government has put the people who, in the past, grew and sold tobacco out of business. Cash crops, pork, beef, horticultural producers, still see the high cost and the low return. I think of our steel-based, our petroleum-based, manufacturing; of course, I think of auto, auto parts, general manufacturing. All these sectors are now being kicked in the stomach.

In my travels across my riding and across the province, I can attest, people are not afraid of work. If they aren't working, they want to work. If they're not working, they volunteer, they pitch in, they help out. That's really part of our history. It's part of our heritage, certainly in Haldimand county, in Norfolk county, and, I would posit, throughout the rest of small-town and rural Ontario.

When times are tough, we realize that we do have a government for a reason—it should work out that way—and yet this government wants to us sign a blank cheque

for its current spending plans while the government MPPs head home to duck out of the storm. I do question this government's direction, and I'm not too prepared to support this continued walk down the garden path, especially given McGuinty's refusal to deal with some of these real issues.

Again, look at the auto sector. The automotive sector is Canada's largest direct employer: 700,000 workers directly employed. Millions of other jobs are indirectly affected. There are about 40,000 firms directly involved in the manufacturing, distributing, selling and repairing of vehicles. That works out to one in every six jobs in Ontario.

Car dealerships: We're all hearing from car dealerships in our ridings. There are 3,100 car dealers across Canada. They employ 155,000 people, and as far as charity alone, the estimate is that they contribute over \$100 million every year to charity. I mean, can you think of a hockey team or a soccer team that's not sponsored in part by a local car dealership? These dealers have invested millions of dollars in their plant and equipment. In recent years they've increased purchases, and the problem they have is that their customers are not buying. We know about the credit crunch.

There are a number of options out there as far as dealing with auto. Many of them focus on the Detroit Three: talk of forgivable loan guarantees, lower capital taxes, lower environmental taxes, perhaps grants to build the new manufacturing required, bridge financing, money to retrain workers, or perhaps relieving them of pension liabilities. This auto sector needs direction. They wish to know where the plan is as well.

Two things are clear in my mind: Stimulus is needed, and the auto sector does need help. The analysts tell us that the credit crisis means their potential customers can't get a car loan. Further to that—and even Monday morning, travelling in my riding in Norfolk, and previously travelling in Haldimand county—I've received recommendations as far as helping out auto: essentially, assistance by providing the potential customers themselves with a cut to PST and a cut to GST charged on a new car or truck purchase; it may apply to a used vehicle. So that's some of the input I'm getting from people directly in my riding. I really haven't heard anything specific from this particular government, and I do remind the members opposite: Develop a plan for auto. You have to focus. You have to think of that expression coming from south of the border: "It's the economy, stupid." Focus. The clock is ticking. We must be cognizant of the very real job, the economic implications at stake. These are very time-sensitive issues, and it's not the time for this Ontario government to procrastinate.

Now, the Premier has acknowledged "an element of merit" in the argument that the Detroit automakers are the architects of their own misfortune; they should be allowed to succumb to the discipline of the market. I have a problem with this view. We know that, as the heartland of Canada's auto industry, Ontario would obviously be hardest hit if any of the Big Three filed for

bankruptcy. That would be a devastating blow to this province, a province that has already acknowledged a \$500-million deficit. I think it's going to be much more than that. We're looking at a deficit well into the billions.

The Canadian subsidiaries of the Detroit Three—GM, Ford and Chrysler—employ 30,000 workers in Canada. The broader auto sector, the parts business, has significant business in Simcoe, down my way, and Tillsonburg next door. Think of the dealers, as I had mentioned. You put that together and we're looking at 400,000 people employed in this business. Mr. McGuinty has admitted that if one or more of the Big Three automakers collapses, this province has no plan B; he would not know what to do. I quote McGuinty again: He's "not even going to think about that."

Yet here we have a government today that's asking us, through concurrences, to think about allowing it to continue on its current direction while this House sits empty after Christmas, during the largest economic crisis of our generation. I feel that is cause for worry. We should worry, and I have very little confidence in the direction that this government is taking right now.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I actually was looking forward to making some comments on this interim supply motion, because it allows us, by the rules of the House, to talk generally about the economy and the budget of Ontario.

I want to pick up on something my good friend Mr. Barrett—I forget the name of the riding—raised in his speech. That is that the economy is turning, and it's not turning for the better. We see this worldwide. What I guess is frustrating to Ontarians and Canadians is that it would seem that the federal government and at least this government do not want to be in the Legislature answering questions on behalf of the opposition—or answering questions of the media on a daily basis—in tough economic times. And so this government is going to prorogue this House. There are no guarantees about when its coming back.

I think the point made is Ontario citizens and Canadians want to have their governments and they want to have their members in the legislatures, according to their calendars, according to House calendar, which says we'd normally come back in February. I'm not arguing that we don't deserve to go back to our constituencies during Christmas, but they expect us to come back here early.

I would just think that the government, in this tough economic time, would say, "Listen, we all, as members, need to roll up our sleeves." Nobody—no one single party, no one single member—has an answer to all the questions about what's going on in the economy, and what the responses are. It seems to me that it's incumbent upon the government to have members in this Legislature, and our committees active, so that we're able to have the discussions about what the response should be to the downturn in the Ontario economy. I want to talk about a few of those things today in the time that we have on this interim supply motion.

I say to both the Conservatives in Ottawa under Mr. Harper and the McGuinty government here in Ontario, a pox on both your houses. I think Ontarians and Canadians want to see their legislators at work here in Queen's Park and in Ottawa. They want to see us engaged, not in name-calling—because I agree with those out there who don't like that—but in real dialogue about what we need to do to turn this economy around. You can't do that when Houses are prorogued and members come back based on whenever the Premier of Ontario decides that we're going come back.

In the short time that I have in this interim supply motion, I want to talk about some of the things that I think we need to be doing as a response to what's happening in the economy.

First of all, let's understand. We heard Chrysler say today that they want \$1.5 billion from Canada and Ontario in order to safeguard the plants here in Ontario. That's a lot of money; it works out to about \$200,000 per worker, so it's a pretty big bailout package. Nonetheless, we need to respond to this. The issue is going to be—for us as Ontario and for Canada—to what degree do we help Chrysler and not help Honda, GM, Ford and everybody else who's in the automotive business?

We need to look at this from a sectoral perspective. As we have a forest industry and we need to have a sectoral response to what's happening in forestry, we need to have a sectoral response to what is happening in other parts of the economy, such as auto.

And I think what really galls Ontarians—and I think the media are now starting to turn their guns on government, because they're saying, "Listen, you've allowed this thing to happen. Your responses have been fairly weak up to now. You've basically allowed this to become an issue where now the automakers are coming, and the government's inviting you in to have some back-room discussions about what the response should be, and as a result of that, things are being ratcheted up far more than they need to be."

I think that we have to have a very clear, transparent, public debate about how we're going to spend tax dollars in Ontario, and how we're going to spend tax dollars in Canada, to assist these industries that are having difficulty. We're talking about huge sums of money. We saw the United States put together a \$700-billion-plus program to respond to what's happening in their economy, and we've seen Canada respond in kind. I think it's some \$35 billion that Canada is putting forward. And certainly Ontario is going to have to put something on the table if we're prepared to support our economy and allow things to happen that prevent the closure of these large employers and smaller employers across this province.

It seems to me where we have a real problem is that this government, first of all, I believe, doesn't have a real plan. They've done some tinkering here in this, no question. There have been some key investments that have helped in places like Honda and others. I give the government credit for that, but there is no real sectoral strategy about what's going to be Ontario's response to

the industries that are affected by this downturn. How much can we afford as a province? Because we have a limited amount of resources ourselves. Can we afford, on an annual basis, \$1 billion, \$2 billion, \$5 billion, \$10 billion? Do we go into debt for it? Those are questions that we have to ask, and I think it's incumbent upon us as legislators, and extremely incumbent upon the Premier of Ontario, to have that open and to have a transparent debate where the public is engaged with us about what the response should be.

Then we should be calling the captains of industry before our legislative committees. Let them come to the full scrutiny of the public in order to say, "Here's what we want," and it's none of this back-room stuff. They need to be held accountable.

We saw what happened in the United States. Thank God they had a transparent process there. They got called before Congress and they all showed up in their private jets. They were criticized, rightly, that they shouldn't be wasting the money of the shareholders and the workers of those corporations on private jets when they're going to ask the government for a huge public-dollar bailout.

It's important that this is made transparent so that the captains of industry understand, if you're asking government for money—and we're willing to help you. There's not a member in this House, I would think—I hope the Conservatives don't have a problem; I know ideologically they might, but I think in the end they would do the right thing—or party in this House that doesn't understand that we need to put something on the table to help our industries.

The question becomes, how much? How much could we afford? How are we going to pay for it? Is it debt? Is it reductions of other expenditures within the government? That has to be a very clear and transparent process where, yes, tough questions are asked by members of the opposition to the government. The government needs to respond and defend what they're doing and, I would argue, adjust what they're doing based on what we're trying to tell them by way of questions in the House, and allow this debate to happen publicly in the Legislature so everybody can see what we're talking about—there's nothing behind closed doors—and we have a full committee process that allows the public to be engaged. The captains of industry have to show up at those particular committees to defend publicly what they want us to spend.

My friends, it's not my money and it's not your money on the other side of the House. It's the Ontario taxpayers' money, and we're charged to make sure that we do a good job and make key investments for the people of Ontario that work for us, that we attach some conditions to it, and that we're transparent about how we're going to sell it.

I would say on the premise at the very beginning, I agree we're going to have to put some money on table. What the number is will be determined by the process.

One of the key things we have to say to industry is this: "Whatever money we give you, we as the Ontario

government are going to make sure that there are some conditions tied to that money. It might be a number of things; for example, that the money we give you is not going to be used to develop products that are going to be manufactured in Mexico or China or the United States, that if we're using Ontario taxpayers' dollars, we want an assurance that that money will be invested in Ontario corporations and it will be spent in Ontario. We will source as much of that money for R&D, and do whatever needs to be done within industry in order to retool or whatever, to Ontario companies, so that our public dollars given or lent to these companies are leveraging back employment in Ontario." That's the very first thing we've got to say to them.

I also want to say this just in passing: We should not be trying to pick the winners. This is something I really feel strongly about. We need to allow those corporations, companies and entrepreneurs who think that they've got a problem and can do something positive for our economy to come before us too and tell us what it is they need, and if there is some way we can deal with it. I would argue that we basically try to do this in a way that's transparent and fair to all, both the taxpayers and those who are asking for the money.

One of the other conditions that we have to give, when giving money to corporations, is we have to make sure that workers are protected. We have to say to them, "You will treat your workers fairly. You will not utilize these economic conditions to try to get concessions in your collective agreements, should you be unionized, or concessions from workers who are not protected by a union." I think that's only fair. If we're going to put public dollars into a corporation, we need to make sure that it's not the workers who are going to pay by way of concession, whether they're unionized or non-unionized. That should be a condition.

We need to make sure that we safeguard workers' pensions, especially in these companies where we're investing. We need to make sure that the money we're putting in also deals with the issue of pension liability. We know that many corporations in Ontario, with this economic meltdown, are exposed to huge unfunded liabilities in their pension plans. We need to make sure that we protect workers' and retired workers' income that they have worked and given their entire lives to get as pension income. We will have to change pension laws in Ontario. Also, in the short term, we will have to say to industry, "You have a responsibility to protect those workers as well."

Those are some of the key things we have to tell industry if they're coming before us.

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The other issue is that we need to look beyond existing industry.

Oh, just before I go there, one last thing: We need to deal with the credit issue that companies are having and to remember that it's not just the large corporations that are having the credit problem. GM, Chrysler and Ford have their debt issues, and they need to go get some cash,

and we understand why. Their operating capital is down, and they owe some money, and they're being squeezed with what's going on, and they're trying to stay afloat. That's real, and we have to deal with that. But let's not forget about the retailers in this. For example, if you're an automotive dealer, here's what's going on in Ontario, as it is going on across North America: You cannot get the type of financing that you used to get before to put the cars on your lot. The way it normally works is if you're buying cars to sell or if you're a Ski-Doo distributor with Ski-Doos to sell, or any kind of retailer, to put the equipment on your floor, you deal with financing companies that pay the producer, such as GM, for the cars that you're buying, and then they finance it for the time it's on your showroom floor or on your lot to be sold. I'm being told by many retailers across this province that financing is tightening up.

It is getting very expensive and almost impossible, in some cases, for retailers such as automotive dealers, snowmobile dealers, television dealers etc., to finance the stock that goes on their floor. The problem is, if the retailer can't buy the goods from the manufacturer because they can't finance it while it's sitting on the floor in their showroom, it means the manufacturer can't produce. So don't just give money to the corporations to deal with their debt issues; we need to make sure that the retailers are going to be able to get fair access to credit so that they're able to purchase the goods to put on their floor to sell to the consumer.

On the other side, we need to deal with the issue of consumer debt. The other thing I'm being told by dealers across Ontario, be it Ski-Doo dealers, TV dealers, car dealers etc., is that they're having a hard time trying to approve people for loans. In fact, I was talking to one of the automotive dealers the other day. He was telling me he had somebody come into his showroom who wanted to buy a Chrysler product. The guy had \$20,000 down in order to buy this particular Jeep Cherokee or whatever vehicle it was he was trying to buy from Chrysler, and it took the dealer five days to get this guy financed. Can you imagine that? You've got \$20,000 cash, you walk in to buy a \$40,000 or \$50,000 vehicle, and the bank where you have good credit is giving you a hard time to approve you on a loan that has a reasonable rate. There was a time when you could do it through GM financing and others for either 0% down or 1.5%, and they would carry the financing. That helped to sell the cars off the lot in big numbers. Now what's happening is that these companies have retreated from offering credit to their customers who are purchasing their products, so the dealers are having to go to the banks and sometimes the finance companies to try to approve somebody's loan. Even for this particular gentleman, with \$20,000 down—it took five days to approve a person with good credit, with \$20,000 down, to buy a \$50,000 vehicle. We have a problem.

My point is, don't just deal with the big corporation. You've got to deal with the retailer. You've got to allow the retailer to get credit to put stock on the floor so they

can sell it. You need to recognize that it might take a little bit longer to sell in this economy; therefore, we might have to carry that credit cost for a little bit longer, and we need to reduce the credit cost to the retailer, because they're certainly squeezed. Then we've got to deal with the consumer who is trying to get the money to buy the product, and we need to deal with the banks and the finance companies in some way, or the automotive industry if it's a car, to make sure there is a component that allows for easier credit.

The other part is that we also need to deal with the issue of consumer debt overall. There is an increasing amount of debt that is carried by all consumers in this province. I would argue that the vast majority of Ontarians are carrying credit charges on their credit cards month over month. I would argue that there would be a fair number of us, even in this Legislature, who carry balances on our credit cards. I know I do. By the time I do my expenses and work my way around to getting everything in, I'm carrying credit month over month—and they're charging unreasonable amounts of interest on credit cards.

So we have to ask ourselves a pretty fundamental question, as Ontario legislators—and the federal House as well, because a lot of this is federal, but I think we have a role to play—what's fair to be charged on the part of these banks that have been making billions of dollars in profit for years and now all of a sudden are tightening up credit because they've lent each other money and they've made some very bad business investments, so now they're crying poor. These banks are charging people, on credit card charges, huge amounts of interest and all kind of various fees for the services of lending money to the consumer. I think we need to deal with the issue of consumer debt by figuring out what's fair to the consumer and what's fair to the financial institution when it comes to return on the investments for the loan that's given to the consumer, and that the consumer is not paying through the nose—high interest rates and fees that, quite frankly, are unspeakable.

There was a very interesting program on CBC Radio a few months back. They were talking about debit cards. The banks will not disclose to the Canadian government how much revenue they make from service charges on debit cards. Can you imagine? You have a business where they don't have to report how much money they're making on that? They just show it as a consolidated amount of money as far as services, and the Canadian government doesn't know how much money they're making overall for all the various charges off of credit cards and the various charges on bank cards. I think that's ludicrous.

I don't have a problem with the bank making money. God, I want more millionaires in Ontario that we can produce. I want them to make tons and tons of money. I believe in entrepreneurship. I'm a social democrat but I understand the economy is an issue where, if the economy is not firing on all four cylinders, people aren't working, and we're not collecting taxes.

My point is, there comes a social responsibility for the person who makes the money. In the case of banks, I think they've got to disclose to the government what it is they're making as far as service charges, and we have to determine, by way of a transparent public process, is that fair? And act accordingly, according to laws and regulations. I would further say that we need to deal with the issues, as far as bailouts, having to deal with how we're able to assist the consumers to deal with the debt that they're carrying.

I think we need to be very careful here, and that's why I advocate that this should all be done very transparently, and it's got to be done in public. We cannot continue what's happened up to now, where discussions are going on with the Minister of International Trade, the minister of industry, trade and commerce, the Premier and the finance minister—all kinds of private meetings with these corporations coming cap in hand. We need to put that out in the open because the Ontario taxpayer needs to know what's being asked, and they want to know what can be afforded and what should be a proper response to the economic slowdown that we have here in Ontario. I would advocate that we need to do that in a fairly open way.

I just want to end on this point, because I think it's important. I was listening to the CBC this morning, and a comment was made by one of the people asking questions of a federal New Democrat. They were saying, "You guys, you don't believe in entrepreneurship." I just want to say, "Give me a break." I'm a social democrat, and I understand more than anybody else how important the economy is to people.

If people aren't working, they're not contributing to society. It's a huge problem when it comes to our self-esteem as working-class people. We want to make sure that companies make lots of money, because I understand that if they make lots of money, I can go and bargain a better collective agreement. That's the way it works. If my employer is making tons of money, it's a lot easier to get to the bargaining table, if I'm unionized, to get more money. And if I'm not unionized, it's a lot easier for an individual employee to ask for more money from the boss because the boss can't say, "I'm not making no money."

I understand, as a social democrat, that we need to have a strong economy and we have to have people making money. I also believe, as a social democrat, that we should be a lot clearer, I think, in our party. This is part of the reason I'm running for leadership of the Ontario New Democrat Party: I believe that we need to say to Ontarians, "We get it."

Social democracy is not just about a couple of issues around health care, public service and equity and labour issues. Social democracy is about everything. It's about, how do we, as social democrats, respond to the issue of the economy? I believe we should, quite frankly, be very avant-garde as social democrats when it comes to finding ways to allow entrepreneurs to make money, and we should be doing all we can to make this economy flourish.

We need to recognize that Ontario cannot compete as a low-wage economy such as China or India. We're a high-wage economy. If that's the case, then we need do other things to assist our entrepreneurs. First of all, as a social democrat, I say we should be investing in research and development along with industry, labour, communities and whoever else wants to be involved in industry, in order to look at, what are the products of tomorrow? What are people going to want to buy five years from now or 10 years from now, so that we're doing the research and development here in Ontario that situates the Ontario economy to be the people who produce these goods that people are going to want in the future?

RIM is a great example of that here in Ontario. RIM has developed a technology that is now worldwide. It's called the BlackBerry. An Ontario company did that, doing some research and development in our own backyard. Imagine what could happen. How many more successes such as RIM could we have if we were really serious around research and development?

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I say, as a social democrat, we should be looking at ways to encourage research and development. We should be looking at forwarding tax credits. For example, allow a company that has corporate tax to pay to defer for a period of time until the product comes to market and then pay it back at that time when they are making money on their new product. It allows them some cash flow upfront to deal with some R&D money.

I was talking to one particular organization, I think it was in Waterloo, and they were saying that last year they had to pay \$200,000 worth of corporate tax. The suggestion was made, and I thought it was a good one, that they should be allowed to defer the payment of that tax until the research and development pays off on a product that's being sold, and then they can pay it back to the Ontario government as they're making money with the new product. This allows them at least to raise \$200,000 and gives them some cash flow to do what they've got to do.

I also believe that we, as a government, should be looking at ways to assist with our own money in institutions such as colleges, universities, trade unions, economic development corporations, municipalities, etc., to find ways to fund research and development in Ontario so that the entrepreneurs decide themselves how we can help them fund some of this.

I'm going to say this: We should not try to pick the winners. I think it is wrong if we, as legislators, say, "We're going to do it in this sector or that sector." Listen, that doesn't work. I'll tell you a couple of stories why I think it doesn't work.

When Edison invented the phonograph, everybody thought it was a stupid idea.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Really?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, yeah. Go back and read the story of Edison. It's a fascinating story. He invents the phonograph and people thought it was just a toy. It's one of the largest industries now as a result of that invention,

the playback of music on various devices. If government was the one to pick the winners, they would never have picked Thomas Edison.

That's why I'm saying that, as a government we can't be picking the winners. We have to go to the financial institutions and say, "We, as the province, will backstop the loan to any business application that is made to your bank that you think you can sit with, that you think makes some sense." If the entrepreneur comes in and says, "I want \$2 million," and you're able to raise, as the entrepreneur, let's say \$500,000 of your own money and you need \$1.5 million from the bank and the bank says, "Well, I'm not quite comfortable. I think we're putting ourselves on the edge for a little bit too much," then we, as a province, should back that loan. I don't think it should be a question of us picking the winner. I think we need to say to financial institutions, "If you're prepared to put up some of your money as risk on this project, we'll help backstop some of that risk."

Here's what I would do—and I'm just making these numbers up. It's not a hard-and-fast number, but the idea would be that maybe we secure the loan to a degree of 20%, but then we say, "If you want to bring your industry to a place that's more economically depressed in Ontario, we will up that percentage." So the entrepreneur says, "Okay, I can get 20% if I'm in downtown Toronto or Kitchener or whatever"—well, Kitchener now would probably be more economically depressed—"or I can get 40% if I go to Kingston. Maybe I can get 50% if I go to Timmins." You see where I'm going. It allows development to happen in different regions of the province.

I think we need to look, as a Legislature, at how we can finance some of this money that they need to leverage in order to make investments in their company to produce the products of tomorrow.

The last part of it is, we need to be very serious about training. We need to, as a province, really change our training system. Yes, colleges and universities are a big part of training and they have a role to play, but I know from being in industry—I was an industrial electrician in the mining sector—that not everything I learned at school is applicable to what I'm doing in my workplace. There's specific training that has to happen in the workplace to understand the equipment being used and the technology being used that may not be taught at the community college or university level.

We need continuing education within the workplace, funded by the province and the federal government. Why? I believe, as a social democrat, it should not be entirely the responsibility of industry to pay for training, and I'll tell you why. You have a company down the street that makes widgets. Let's say you spend \$1 million a year to train employees. The economy starts to go well. Where do your employees go if they can get more money down the street? So now you've trained a bunch of workers out of your pocket and they then go to your competitor, and the competitor who didn't want to pay for training says, "Come on in. It's free. Oh, man, I love this."

I'm saying that we, as a province, need to recognize that training is one of those things that could be looked at as a backbone of what makes good economic policy, and I think it's part of the infrastructure. So we, as a province, have to be much more engaged in the cost of training and also assist in providing the training within those workplaces that's needed to do what has to be done.

I also believe we need to really deal with the small business issue. There are a lot of things we can do in this province that allow us to deal with the small business issues that would really take up some of the burden of some of the things that business has to do.

I proposed, for example, in my leadership campaign something very simple, that we do tax remittances—PST/GST—real-time on computers. If I can take my bank card and I can go to any store in any place in Ontario, gas station or retailer, and I can pay with a bank card and it automatically is taken out of my account and put in the merchant's account, certainly we can install software on cash registers that allow, when the retailer is either collecting cash or by way of credit card or debit card, any transaction, the PST/GST to be automatically calculated off the register and automatically remitted, real time, to the government of Ontario account. At the end of the day, there's a report and the software allows the merchant to see and make sure that things have gone right.

We wouldn't have to spend any money on collection—saves us, as a province, tons of money. It would take the burden off the retailer to do all the reporting that they have to do for GST/PST, collect, put the money in bank, cut a cheque, then PST/GST come back and say, "Oh, you didn't do it right, because we changed the rules last week and we forgot to tell you." How many times has that happened to you? We get those complaints as well, right? So it allows it to be put in the software so that the retailer doesn't have to fuss about the collection of PST/GST and doesn't have to fuss with the reporting of collection and how you deal with that. It would cost us some money as a province, but I think it would be a great investment in order to help small business.

The other issue is that we need to take a look at the question of auditing. I've been running around this province over this leadership race, talking to all kinds of people, either in business or individuals. I was talking to a guy the other day who is in the retail business, and he said, "Last year I had three different provincial ministries come in and audit me. I had the people come in for the health tax, I had the auditors for the WSIB, and the other one was for GST/PST."

"So three times last year, I had provincial auditors in my business, going through my books, disrupting my bookkeeper, holding up time—that I had very little of—in order to deal with these audits. Why in heck don't you send one auditor? I don't care if you want to audit me. Pick me at random and have somebody who's trained to look at all my books and to say, 'Oh, there's a problem with the PST or the GST or the HST, the provincial sales

tax or the payroll tax or whatever,' and look at the books in their entirety. At least that way I would only get one auditor." And, God, we would save money.

Can you imagine that, as a province? We can actually train our people to do this. It doesn't mean the loss of jobs in the civil service; it just means we train people to do things better. So I think there are a lot of things that we need to do in these tough economic times that would help us put Ontario back on the map when it comes to being the economy that we were. It's sad, but it's true.

Places like Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba have done far more to assist with their economies, both by the natural resources they have—yes, oil and gas—but also, if you look at Saskatchewan and Manitoba, they've done some really excellent stuff to try to find ways to key investment in their province to the point that Saskatchewan is now coming to Ontario and asking Ontario workers who are unemployed to go and work in their province, because they've been so successful. The problem for us is we've sat back and had it too good in Ontario for too long. I don't know if my colleague wants any time on this? No. Okay.

I say this openly. This province, for far too long, has had it very good and an economy that worked to our advantage. We had the United States, the largest trading partner to the south. We had a low Canadian dollar. We had electricity at cost, through a public utility called Ontario Hydro, that was a huge economic development tool for Ontario; it allowed the construction of many industries around this province that located here because of that public policy. We have the natural resources such as fibre out of trees, minerals underground, the farming industry and others that allowed to us really position ourselves as a very strong economy. The problem is globalization is happening, and industries are saying, "We might still need to mine the ore out of Timmons and cut the trees, but we can do the manufacturing somewhere in the Third World."

We're losing the jobs by the tens of thousands, the hundreds of thousands, on a yearly and monthly basis, and I think the problem is that Ontario has not responded to the changes and globalization adequately. We have not tried to position our economy to be that economy of tomorrow. We have not tried in any way, shape or form to say, "What can we do here in Ontario that allows us"—not to stop globalization, because I understand as a social democrat it's hard to stop, but clearly we can do things in order to negate the negative effects of globalization. We need to do things in Ontario that are to our advantage when it comes to the policies of this province. I'll just give you a few—

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Mr. Peter Kormos: We should be exporting prosperity, not importing despair.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's a very good point. We should be exporting prosperity, not importing despair. I think you're 100% right.

There are things that we can do in Ontario that would put Ontario in a much better position to deal with what's

happening in the economy. I say to the provincial government, you have not responded, Mr. McGuinty, with all due respect, to any of the things that really need to be done in this economy.

To prorogue the House—my God, you're not any better than Stephen Harper. Let's just say it right out. Liberals, Tories—kind of the same old story, right? They're going to prorogue the House in the middle of an economic crisis. I understand that people have to get home for Christmas. I've got a family, too.

Mr. Peter Kormos: What about that Rae fellow?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That Rae fellow is crying nowadays. But he's not talking to me anymore. That's okay; I don't mind. I don't miss him. He never talked to me when he was here. That's a whole other story.

I would just say, to prorogue the House in the middle of an economic crisis is a sign that this government does not want to have public scrutiny, and that's a huge problem.

I say again, the process has got to be transparent. If the captains of industry are coming to Ontario and saying, "Open up your chequebook," I want a public debate. I want us to ask questions of the government. I want the media to scrutinize the government. I want the captains of industry to stand before legislative committees and defend to the public, let alone us, through the public process of committees, why they want \$1.5 billion. There may be very good reasons why GM wants that, but I have a hard time trying to square off an investment of \$200,000 per employee without us having a really frank discussion about what conditions we're going to set on those investments.

If we're going to give that money, we need to have some assurances that they are going to spend that money in Ontario, that they're going to buy their products from other Ontario manufacturers, that they're going to source the services to other Ontario firms, that they're not going to send the products that they're building here to a production plant outside of the country after we've given them money, such as this government did with the GM people in Oshawa—what a tragedy. We need to ensure that we protect workers, so that if employers are getting some money, they are not going to the employees and asking for concessions—either collective bargaining or for workers who are not protected by a union. We need to protect the pension plans of workers. If we're going to be lending money to these guys, we need to make sure that we properly protect workers and their pensions. Also, most important is to protect the communities that these employers are in.

We need to do all that we can to, yes, help industry and to, yes, help turn the economy, but we need to set some conditions so that in the end the public is protected.

I say to this government, you're no better than Stephen Harper when you prorogue the House in the middle of an economic crisis.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: It is always a pleasure to follow my colleague from Timmins-James Bay. While those of

us on the governing side don't have any personal stake in the race in which he's engaged for the leadership of his party, there can be no doubt that the member for Timmins-James Bay brings a very informed, very passionate, very consistent and coherent set of arguments to this floor, and I think we all benefit from his participation as our colleague in this Legislature. While I don't agree with many of the things that he said, I certainly have to commend him on a very interesting address this afternoon on this concurrence motion.

I'd like to talk a little bit on this concurrence motion and about what some of this means to those of us who live in the fast-growing 905 belt, particularly in my home city of Mississauga. I'd like to talk about what the continuing efforts of the motion before us—what difference that has made and continues to make in the city of Mississauga.

In the city of Mississauga, we are a little bit close to halfway toward a measure that the government set forth in our budget in 2007. This is very important to those of us in the 905 belt: It was the elimination of GTA pooling, which was a process whereby some \$40 million a year came from the taxpayers of Mississauga and Brampton and was sent to the city of Toronto without any accountability at all by us. It was the wrong thing to do. It was a measure that preceded our government and it was one that we said we could address over a period of six years. We will soon, next fiscal year, go into the third of those six fiscal years and be on the path toward eliminating it.

Just about three weeks ago, our Mississauga colleagues had an opportunity to get together, as we occasionally do, with the mayor and the council, and in this case, with our two newly elected members of Parliament in Mississauga. The lot of us got together and we had a chance to chat—something that we have worked very hard on, which is to improve our dialogue with our city. Mayor McCallion closed the door and we all had a chance to say what was on our minds, what were the things that we needed and in what ways could we work together, because one of the comments I made is that no one of us is the government. When people come to us and say, "I need the government to do something," we are all the government and we all have to work at it together.

After that, what we were able to do is to make a ceremonial cheque presentation of some \$24.95 million in infrastructure money to the city of Mississauga, money that is going to make a real difference in some of the projects that the city makes. Now, at this point, it's up to the city to decide how to spend it, but our philosophy as a government toward our city is, "You are a mature level of government. We trust you. We believe in you. We're going to work together with you."

As the mayor once said, the difference here is that if the feds—and I don't mean this as a shot to my colleagues across the floor because it was as true under the former government as it is under this government—say they're going to send you some money, they send you an IOU; if the province says they're going to send you some

money, they flow it into your bank account electronically.

After that \$24.95 million, I'd like to also mention that some things that were inappropriate for the property tax base were removed—for example, Ontario drug benefits, ODSP, land ambulance. The municipal property tax base isn't the right place for those, and now they're gone. For a municipality that means that our taxes, which are higher than they are in Toronto, despite being a very well managed city that's entirely debt-free—we can ease some of the pressure on the taxpayer of the city of Mississauga.

I'd like to talk a little bit about some of the financial progress that Ontario has made just in the last several weeks. Just last week, the Bank of Montreal announced a new office facility in northwest Mississauga, in Meadowvale, one of the communities that I represent—it'll be built on Argentia Road—a state-of-the-art, \$75-million customer contact centre. It's going to create 1,200 jobs. It's financed by Sun Life Financial—First Gulf Corp. is one of the partners—and it will be the largest new office building in Mississauga, completely state-of-the-art in energy efficiency. It'll be complete in about two years.

Another project, again a private sector project, that's been happening in a climate that we have all in this House been working to foster and maintain is Cyclone Manufacturing, a state-of-the-art firm in Meadowvale—Meadowvale's been on a roll—that does computer-aided design and manufacturing of precision aircraft parts for all the largest aircraft manufacturers in the world. They can use a single block of aluminium, they can produce an engine part or a piece for an airframe, without a single weld or rivet—really high-tech stuff. They just expanded into a brand new building in Meadowvale. So in addition to their existing state-of-the-art place, they're building a new one. This is important in our community.

Credit Valley Hospital, phase 2, began a year early, a year ahead of schedule, in June 2008. It'll be finished some time in 2010 or 2011. It's on time, it's on budget. This is going to be a major redevelopment: some 275,000 square feet of new space and a redevelopment of existing space. This means for us a major expansion of the maternity suite; it's going to ease some of the pressure on our operating rooms. I was just in the operating rooms with some of our surgeons during constituency week in November. I went in and changed where the surgeons change. Let me say this: If your children went in to play hockey and had to change in a space that cramped, as parents, you'd be up in arms. The hospital just recently found a way to put a washroom in there so that the surgeons don't have to go down the hall to wash their hands. We definitely need some of the expansion room that the ambulatory surgery centre is going to give us.

In GO Transit, there's a major renovation program under way at Streetsville with the new access tunnel for those of us who are taking—and I'm one of those many days—the last three trains in the morning. You're not going to face that nearly two-block walk from the back of the lot up to the station, through the tunnel, onto the platform, and then to where you want to get on the train.

We've finished resurfacing the walkway leading to the station. There will be a reconfiguration of the kiss-and-ride, which is just now in progress, and some other general fix-ups on the station. That project will be complete this winter, a major infrastructure project right in Streetsville.

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At Meadowvale, the platform's been extended to handle the new 12-car trains, along with improved disabled access, and of course improvements to the platform. At Lisgar, the station that I petitioned this House to have built in 2003-04 and which was completed ahead of schedule and well within budget in mid-2007, that station will soon have a new 50-kilowatt wind generator on it. That will enable it to generate, when the wind is blowing, all of the power that the station consumes.

There have been, on the government's watch, six new schools built in the neighbourhoods of Lisgar, Streetsville, Churchill Meadows and central Erin Mills in the last five years, and these are major, major things that our communities need. We have major capital projects that are already complete to some of our elementary and our high schools.

Just one final point: The member for Timmins-James Bay proposed measures to defer corporate tax until later. I'd just like to point out that the government's budget in 2008 already implemented a measure that allows a 10-year tax-free period if you commercialize innovation products from anywhere in Canada right here in Ontario.

Speaker, I believe that there are still a few other members who would like to say a few things on this concurrence motion, so I thank you very much for the time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to rise on the concurrences motion before the Assembly. There are a number of topics that I wanted to address related to the concurrences motion which would assign certain funds to certain ministries. Originally, as you know, we were going to be addressing Bill 126 today, and in the time ahead with the Ministry of Transportation, as it considers what happens going forward on that bill, I thought it important to read in some of the Facebook postings. Believe it or not, Facebook postings; even though it's been banned by the McGuinty government and in the civil service, many members are on Facebook. Here's some that I have received, as well as some e-mails commenting on the proposed Bill 126, that I wanted to ensure were on the record for the benefit of the Minister of Transportation.

Here's one from Glen Futers on the St. Catharines/Niagara network. Mr. Futers said, "As a parent of a 17-year-old young driver and a police officer, I find this proposed new legislation utterly ridiculous. We try to encourage our young to mature and get jobs, socialize with each other, and we are once again going to place limitations on them without any justifiable proof that such legislation would even be effective. I feel for the

father who initiated this journey, but it doesn't matter if the driver has three passengers or one. If a collision occurs and it is serious enough, death will occur." Mr. Futers also goes in his posting to say, "The next issue is the speeding. This again is too restrictive"—but he's run out of room for his post.

I also received one from Doug Musk, also in the St. Catharines/Niagara network. Mr. Musk said, "The speeding changes don't take into account the amount of kilometres over the speed limit. Individuals commuting to school or work could theoretically lose their licence for 30 days by going 10 kilometres over.... I am very worried about what social engineering this government will engage in next."

Andrew Dowie from the University of Ottawa posted, "The McGuinty bill pre-judges youth as being automatic offenders. It treats youth more harshly, penalty-wise, than the rest of us for undertaking exactly the same behaviour."

"I don't know what kind of childhood the Premier had, but an integral part of mine was congregating with friends around a bonfire out in the country somewhere, going to the movies, visiting friends, and camping on weekends. Since few (if any) 16-year-olds can afford a car of their own at that age, carpooling/ride-sharing is a must!"

There are many others that we received. I think in the interests of time I will highlight those that took the time to post on Facebook. Here are some e-mails that we received to our website about the same legislation.

Ben Van Weelden of Smithville, Ontario wrote a long e-mail. I'll read parts of it. It says, "Hello, Tim,

"It's been a while since we've talked—I remember you coming into my grade 8 class about five or six years ago." It shows that you've been in the Legislature for quite some time when elementary school students whose class you visited are now driving or in the workforce.

Ben Van Weelden goes on to say the following:

"I'm 19 years old, in my second year at Niagara College, and I've paid my own way. I have received no OSAP, I pay my own insurance, I pay for my own gas, I pay for my books, and I pay for all of my tuition.

"My driving record is still 100% clean, and for me to be penalized because someone else's kid made an error in judgment isn't entirely fair."

He also says, "I can also ... give you the perspective of a teenager. I can guarantee you that if I had been forced to wait longer between G1 and G2, it would 100% have not affected the way I drive."

That's Mr. Van Weelden, expressing his opposition to that legislation.

Tony Kamphuis, from Smithville, Ontario—another very thoughtful letter that he sent to Premier McGuinty and the transportation minister, and he was kind enough to copy me on it. I'll highlight some of his points.

"Dear Mr. McGuinty,

"....The restriction on the number of teenaged passengers who can travel with a driver under 21 years of

age is too intrusive an intervention into an area in which you simply need to allow for personal responsibility.

"First, it discriminates on the basis of age. I have a responsible teenaged son who would see his opportunities significantly restricted through absolutely no fault of his own, but purely because of the group of which he is involuntarily a part. That is just not right. We wouldn't allow this on the basis of colour, creed or orientation and we certainly shouldn't allow it in this case."

Mr. Kamphuis's second point deals with the fact that public transportation is simply not available, whether it's small-town rural Ontario like Smithville and West Lincoln in my riding, or other communities.

His third point concerns the environment and how this will cause a disincentive to carpool.

His fourth point says that "since your government does not allow our teenagers to travel on publicly funded school buses because they attend a faith-based school, our children and many other families need to have their children carpool to get to school. Again, if we are encouraging them to join school teams or the school play, before- or after-school practices are just a way of life. There is no public transportation option available and this restriction will literally at least double the number of trips we would need to make between our home and school—not to mention our church, area hockey arenas and soccer fields etc."

"I can see that on the surface of it, this part of the proposed regulation may have seemed like a good idea, but I would strongly urge you to listen to the voices of your citizens and let this idea fade away. There is no dishonour in listening to citizens as part of the democratic process!"

Again, from Tony Kamphuis.

Susan Scott e-mailed me—again, a very thoughtful e-mail. Here are some highlights.

With respect to the changes in the G2, "I am opposed to this change for a variety of reasons. I do not believe that responsibility is something that someone wakes up with upon their 21st birthday; responsibility is learned. I am of the opinion that if restrictions are placed on 'new drivers' then they should be across the board, no matter what the age of the 'new driver.'"

She goes on to say in her e-mail, "This legislation does not promote the practice of being a designated driver."

"This change in legislation is also contrary to the values of the charter, as it does not impose the same restrictions on drivers of comparable or less experience but longer in the tooth."

To conclude, Ms. Scott says, "I believe that driving skill is not based on age but on responsibility."

Jeroen Elsinga—again, a thoughtful e-mail, a number of paragraphs long. Here are some highlights. "As for the licence suspension, for reasons such as speeding," he has some concerns about that, and concerns about the impact on carpooling, because if you're trying to get to church, to sports activities, to social activities, the proposal that the transportation minister brought forward would discourage that significantly.

The last of the e-mail highlights are from Jill, a mom: "We are sending our children off to college and university younger, and now you're telling my 18-year-old son that he can't carpool with two of his friends because he is 18. How is this fair?"

She also talks about the impact on the environment and concludes by saying, "Sounds like this wasn't thought out completely. The good kids are being penalized for those irresponsible ones."

I wanted to make sure those got into the record as the Legislature continues with this bill. I'll be registering my opposition in voting against the legislation that Premier McGuinty has brought forward—mind you, at a time when hundreds of thousands of jobs have left the province of Ontario and when Ontario is dead last in economic growth and job creation in Confederation and, sadly, has become a have-not province.

1730

As we also consider the concurrences, I again want to bring to the attention of the Minister of Health, in the allocations to the Ministry of Health, the importance of helping Andrew Lanese. Andrew is a brave 11-year-old boy who lives in Pelham in the community of Niagara. My colleague, Mr. Kormos from Welland, has addressed this issue, and I have also supported public funding to help Andrew, who suffers from Hunter syndrome. If not treated, Andrew faces further damage to his tissue and organ functions and even premature death. The medication available—Elaprase—is actually covered in the provinces of British Columbia and Alberta, but because Andrew lives in Ontario, sadly, it is not covered. Through very generous community support and fund-raising, they've provided the first set of treatments for Andrew Lanese out of their own pocket—private funds. We have seen absolutely remarkable and encouraging progress. Andrew's motor skills have noticeably improved. He can now actually walk greater distances on his own, which he was not capable of doing before he had this medical treatment.

It would be an absolute shame, it would be a crime, to see Andrew then regress after this progress has been made. Again, I do call upon the Minister of Health to fund Elaprase for Andrew Lanese. As you may know, the ministry is taking it on an individual-by-individual, case-by-case basis. I understand there are two others who have actually been funded to help combat Hunter syndrome. I understand there are only about six individuals in the province who suffer from this rare and very harmful degenerative disease. I don't understand how the Ministry of Health can draw the line between two individuals and not the rest, particularly when you've seen the kind of progress Andrew has made to date with Elaprase. I do hope the minister in the time ahead, with the funding he has been allocated, will send some funding Andrew's way.

The last point I want to make is with respect to the Eramosa karst and the feeder lands in Stoney Creek. My colleague Paul Miller, who represents the more northern reaches of Stoney Creek—I have the southern portion

above the escarpment—has worked on this issue and I've worked on this issue; we've worked well together. As you may know, the 185-acre Eramosa Karst Conservation area was set aside, protected from development. It is a unique environmental feature. That work was begun and advanced under the previous PC government. The Liberal government then furthered that work. The next step is to preserve the feeder lands that bring the water into the Eramosa karst.

I expect that the Ontario Realty Corp. will be making a decision soon about the future of that land. I think it's absolutely important to preserving green space and unique environmental features that the feeder lands be set aside as well. I look forward to working with my colleague Mr. Miller on that, and hopefully the other Hamilton members, in seeing that preserved.

Lastly, we had presented a very thoughtful report entitled *Where Do We Grow From Here?* on the future of the tender fruit industry. I do ask the Minister of Agriculture, with the funding she has been allocated in the time ahead, to move forward on these recommendations in that report. That's based on the best advice of the farmers, the small businesses and municipal leaders in our area. She does have a copy of the report; we have not heard back yet. I hope she does advance these important causes to support the unique tender fruit lands and the grape-growing area in the Niagara Peninsula.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your attention to these comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: It's my pleasure to rise today to add to the debate on concurrences.

I'm a firm believer in fate. Is it fate that we are debating concurrences the day after the Auditor General uncovered a treasure trove of inefficiencies, wasted spending and virtually no ministerial oversight? The Auditor General's report confirms what every member of our PC caucus has been saying for months, that the McGuinty government has recklessly spent the hard-earned tax dollars of the citizens of Ontario in good economic times. He has done so without a clear plan, without ministerial oversight and, in particular, with reckless disregard for some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Through the auditor's report we not only know that the Minister of Education has been not in keeping with the facts in commenting to the parents of our special-needs students, but has stood there in this House on June 18, earlier this year, and said, "We know that when those systems are not working, when the accountability is not in place, when there are breaches of protocols and guidelines, then there needs to be action taken by the government. That's what we've done. The public accountability measures are in place and are increasing."

The minister assured us a mere six months ago that her government took action and that the appropriate accountability measures were in place. Just in case the minister has forgotten, let me remind the House what the Auditor General found plain as day in the Ministry of Education.

The Auditor General found that since 2001-02, special-education grants have increased by 54%—a significant increase, I think. However, the number of students who actually receive special-education services grew a mere 5%. I'm sure that every member of this Legislature has a file in their office of families who need special-education supports and are on a waiting list or perhaps have been cut off support. It is extremely disappointing to learn that this minister has turned a 54% increase in funding into serving a mere 5% more students. I think the minister needs to get back to basics and figure out how such a significant increase can help only 5% more children. This is simply unacceptable to the citizens of Ontario.

To help the minister identify where her oversight issues originate, the Auditor General identified that the information school boards collect about students with special needs does not sufficiently support effective planning and service delivery, program oversight or the identification of effective practices. Schools were unable to measure the gap between the performance of students with special-education needs and the regular curriculum expectations and the reason that the gap even existed. How can you help a special-needs student if you don't have any criteria upon which to determine the effectiveness of your own programming?

What's happening here is that the minister is telling the parents of special-needs students that she has done her due diligence by increasing the funding. What the Minister of Education fails to understand is that simply throwing money at the issue does not ease the burden of families coping with a special-needs child who know in their hearts that their child is suffering and are watching their child struggle every day. Minister, it is insulting to parents when time after time you tell us how much money you are spending. However, you fail to consult with parents to help make the programs more applicable.

The Auditor General clearly stated that school boards did not have sufficient evidence to demonstrate compliance with the requirement in regulation 181/98 of the Education Act to consult with parents in connection with IPRCs and in the preparation of individual education plans. Not only is the minister unable to explain what happened to the 54% increase, but we know that mandated programs are not being carried out. Are they short of funding or is it just lack of oversight? Either way, it's totally irresponsible.

I encourage the parents with special-needs students to share their situations with me and others in the House so that together we can hold this government to account for the way in which the McGuinty government has ignored their children. Most importantly, we can highlight where the Minister of Education needs to focus her attention because clearly her eye has been taken off the ball.

In a classic McGuinty government move, where the left hand doesn't seem to know what the right hand is doing, the ministry does not require that school boards establish procedures to assess the quality of special-education services and supports, whether or not the schools complied with the ministry's legislation, regu-

lations and policies. So here we go again. The minister feels that she has resolved the issues in special education by throwing money at them. My expectation of the minister and her ministry in general is—they are not any more than a glorified pocketbook. I expect, and the parents of special-needs kids expect certainly, that if you allocate money to a program you're going to create some expectations, and they are: Create benchmarks, that you're going to ensure that every school board in the province of Ontario is in compliance with your legislation, and you are definitely going to make certain that the money you have allocated to the school boards for special needs is actually spent on special needs. Suffice to say that the Minister of Education is letting these kids down.

1740

Unfortunately, special needs is not the only area where the minister has not done the job. At a time when accommodation reviews are taking place in virtually every school board in Ontario, the school maintenance and renewal budgets are also being poached. If the people of Ontario are facing a \$500-million deficit, it's no wonder there's absolutely no accountability in this government.

Just listen to the laundry list. Here's the list: One board did not follow its own policies and purchased approximately \$3.5 million in plumbing services from a single-source supplier. Secondly, contrary to policies, these services were not acquired competitively, and many invoices were deliberately split to keep individual payments below \$5,000 and thus avoid having to give written quotes from suppliers. Boards did not always spend funds they received under Good Places to Learn. That's an initiative that the ministry has put forward, with ministry requirements on the highest-priority needs.

At one board in particular, \$2.5 million of Good Places to Learn funding was used on ineligible projects. This board claimed to have spent \$810,000 of its GPL funding on a project that had actually been finished in 2003, before the GPL funding was even ever announced. Boards are not always using the annual capital renewal funds for identified urgent capital needs.

The Auditor General identified overbilling totalling \$41,500. None of the boards audited had established measurable service expectations for their maintenance and custodial services. Consequently, they can't formally assess whether the funds have been cost-effectively spent and expectations have been met.

It's unacceptable in this day and age, and at a time when our youth are not only engaged in environmental stewardship but taught it at schools, that our boards are not leading by example. For instance, not one of the boards audited had established energy consumption targets to reduce electricity, to reduce gas and water consumption by a target amount. This laundry list demonstrates an abject failure by the ministry to rein in the spending. I'm disappointed as a taxpayer, as a critic for this portfolio and as an MPP who knows this government can do better.

The minister should know that this is a wake-up call, and I expect that she will share with the members in this

Legislature a plan for implementing fiscal accountability throughout the ministry to the end of this term. I also expect that she will correct the issues raised in the special-needs funding for the sake of students and their families who are counting on this minister to do this right.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

We'll now vote on the motion for concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

On the motion for concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

On the motion for concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

On the motion for concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

On the motion for concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Research and Innovation, is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

On the motion for concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Labour, is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

On the motion for concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

On the motion for concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Finance, is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

On the motion for concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

On the motion for concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Energy, is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

On the motion for concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

On the motion for concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motions agreed to.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I believe we have unanimous consent to move a motion without notice in regard to the business of the House for the remainder of this week.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Agreed? Agreed. Minister of Tourism.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: We move that, notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House, there be a timetable applied to the consideration of certain business of the House as follows:

Wednesday, December 10, 2008

Morning sitting

Resuming the adjourned debate on the motion for second reading of Bill 126, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and to make consequential amendments to two amending acts.

At 10:15 a.m. the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and put every question necessary to dispose of the motion without further debate or amendment.

Wednesday, December 10, 2008

Following the proceeding "statements by ministries" and prior to the proceeding "petitions" as per the schedule in standing order 8a

That each party be authorized to speak for up to seven minutes on International Human Rights Day.

Afternoon sitting

Debate on the following motions:

A. That the following committees be authorized to meet during the adjournment and/or, in the event of the prorogation of the first session of the 39th Parliament and notwithstanding such prorogation, during the interval between the first and second sessions of the 39th Parliament, and/or upon resumption of the first or second sessions of the 39th Parliament, as follows:

Standing Committee on Government Agencies: February 9 through 11, 2009, inclusive and the afternoon from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. on the first Monday following the resumption of the House in 2009; and

Standing Committee on Public Accounts: four days, commencing no earlier than February 17, 2009, such days to be determined by unanimous decision of the subcommittee on committee business; and

Standing Committee on General Government, which is authorized to consider Bills 118 and 126 concurrently during the week of February 9, 2009, for the purpose of conducting public hearings on the bills in locations in Ontario at the discretion of the committee; and

B. Notwithstanding such prorogation, the following business remaining on the orders and notices paper be continued and placed on the orders and notices paper of the second sessional day of the second session of the 39th Parliament at the same stage of business for the House and its committees as at prorogation:

(i) all government bills, except Bill 1, An Act to Perpetuate an Ancient Parliamentary Right, and Bill 24, An Act to amend the Assessment Act, Community Small Business Investment Funds Act, Corporations Tax Act, Education Act, Income Tax Act, Land Transfer Act and Taxation Act, 2007; and

(ii) the following private members' public bills:

Bill 18, An Act respecting the disclosure of information about marijuana grow operations;

Bill 87, An Act to regulate the motor vehicle towing industry in Ontario;

Bill 91, An Act to amend the Public Vehicles Act respecting bicycle racks on public vehicles;

Bill 101, An Act respecting energy rating for specified residential buildings;

Bill 106, An Act to provide for safer communities and neighbourhoods;

Bill 109, An Act to provide a tax credit for the purchase of equipment or devices for persons with disabilities;

Bill 131, An Act to amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 with respect to retailers of electricity and gas marketers;

Bill 132, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act; and

(iii) all private bills; and

(iv) the ballot list for private members' public business;

and that a new ballot for private members' public business be conducted prior to the commencement of the new session and appended to the existing ballot list; pursuant to standing order 98(c) any member may exchange places in the order of precedence with any other member on either ballot list; and

That the debate on motion A be limited to five minutes per party after which, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the motion and any amendments thereto, without further debate or amendment; and

That following debate and the vote on motion A, the time remaining until 5:50 p.m. for motion B shall be split equally amongst the three recognized parties, following which the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the motion and amendments thereto, without further debate or amendment.

Thursday, December 11, 2008

The House will not meet until 10:30 a.m.

Thursday, December 11, 2008

Afternoon sitting

Consideration of private members' public business—ballot item numbers 64, 65 and 66.

At the conclusion of private members' public business, the Speaker shall adjourn the House to the next sessional day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Would the members like me to read this motion again?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Ms. Smith has moved a motion related to the programming of the House for the next two days. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Orders of the day.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Ms. Smith has moved the adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1752.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O. Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Broten, Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
		Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture
		Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
		Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
		Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
		Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (LIB)	Huron–Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Oraziotti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough—Agincourt	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres
		Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches—East York	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of International Trade and Investment / Ministre du Commerce international et de l'Investissement
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London—Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland—Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds—Grenville	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
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Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton—Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga—Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services / Ministre des Petites Entreprises et des Services aux consommateurs
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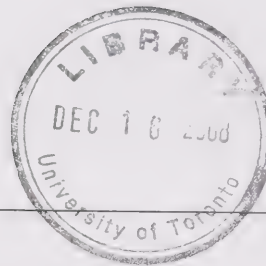
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Mercredi 10 décembre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
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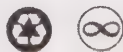
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 10 December 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 10 décembre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a Buddhist prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ROAD SAFETY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ ROUTIÈRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 8, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 126, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and to make consequential amendments to two amending acts / Projet de loi 126, Loi modifiant le Code de la route et apportant des modifications corrélatives à deux lois modificatives.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I am pleased to rise in debate on Bill 126 at second reading. I need to say from the outset that I will be voting against Bill 126; I'll explain why momentarily. I would also like to take this opportunity to read into the record some of the very many e-mails and Facebook postings that I have received against this bill. In fact, I don't think we received a single e-mail or Facebook posting that was in favour of Bill 126.

Certainly, all of us have experienced tragic events where a young person at the wheel may have inadvertently gone off the road—a winter accident, matters related to alcohol. Probably all of us have grown up and lost a friend, sadly perhaps a family member, to such a tragedy. What happens is that the heart compels you to action. We have an opportunity as legislators to try to make a difference, to find ways to ensure that this sort of thing would never happen again.

We also have an important role, though, as a chamber of sober second thought to ensure that any changes that are brought forward through legislation would make a difference and would achieve the proper balance between controlling activities and allowing folks to function in modern society. That's why so much of an outcry was raised over the passengers rule and the harsh penalties assigned to minor offences like rolling through a stop sign. We have also received concerns about the zero blood-alcohol limit in the e-mails and postings to our office and the length of time that would be extended to.

When I first heard about this legislation when it was rolled out, it occurred to me, "Hold on a second, a 19-year-old could qualify for a commercial pilot's licence and fly a plane full of teenaged passengers, but under Bill 126 she is forbidden from driving more than one of them to the airport." Certainly in our area, with students going to Brock and Niagara College and Mohawk and McMaster, among others, the bill in its introductory form and in the proclamations of the minister and the Premier would mean that a 19-year-old Brock or Mohawk student, for example, with a full-time job, couldn't carpool to school or to work with others his own age without breaking the law. That was the major theme that was brought forward in the Facebook postings that I'll read, as well as a reaction to very steep, harsh penalties related to, in the grand scheme of things, relatively minor offences.

Christopher Van Lane posted on 20 November about the speeding: "Since when has any driver lost his licence on the spot for driving one kilometre over the speed limit? This sets a very dangerous precedent. I realize this is conceived in response to a genuine tragedy and my sympathies are with the bereaved father involved. Unfortunately, it perpetuates what has become a pattern with this government. Lacking either the will or the competence to enforce existing laws, the McGuinty Liberals respond by enacting draconian new laws, each more heavy-handed than the last."

Julius Parent from McMaster wrote: "Of all the traffic and driving-related changes that could be made, this is probably the least effective and the least necessary. How about better regulation of trucks on our highways? How about clamping down on erratic highway driving on drivers not signalling etc. Also, from what I've seen, the majority of speeders seem to be middle-aged men and women, not teens. Again, this just shows how out of touch Dalton is on the issues."

Colin Devries posted on Facebook: "This is ridiculous, draconian, even. The ethical problems with this legislation are severe and set a dangerous precedent." Mr. Devries's e-mail was long, but in the interest of time I'll go through a few more.

Ashley Struger wrote: "This does not sound very practical, especially for families who purchase third cars for their children to go back and forth to school. If there are more than two children, then does one have to walk?"

William Altie wrote in: "Style over substance, Tim. Major economic crises currently happening and he"—meaning Dalton McGuinty—"is dithering with this junk."

Tell him to get on with what's important. We are now a have-not province. Come on."

That's certainly a theme that we have received as well. There was dramatic news just over a month ago that for the first time in the history of Confederation, Ontario would be receiving equalization payments as a have-not province. The Premier and his economic ministers have yet to produce any kind of plan to grow us out of have-not status and, even more shockingly, seem to just take it as a natural course of business, a fait accompli, something that they can do nothing about. Their only strategy seems to be to put out their hand to Ottawa and saying, "Please, sir, may I have another?" in terms of equalization grants.

Dave Panko wrote the following: "I assume the premise of this proposal is so teens aren't driving around distracted and ending up in an accident where there could be multiple fatalities or serious injuries. That's all well and good, but instead of having five or six kids in the vehicle, you will now have three separate drivers on their way to the same party. Odds are pretty good they're going to have three DDs, right? And there will be no temptation to race, either."

Obviously a bit of facetiousness in the comments from Mr. Panko indicating, I think, in his suggestions that putting even more cars on the road would probably increase not only the impact on the environment but, importantly, the chances of an automobile accident if you have a series of folks coming back from a party in a series of cars.

While I do appreciate the fact that the Minister of Transportation is here listening to the debate—that is a longstanding tradition in the Legislature; not all ministers, however, follow that. I know that the Minister of Transportation is one who is always very respectful of what the opposition comments are on legislation that he brings to the Legislature.

I do want to commend to the minister, on a related topic, a very interesting column by Lawrence Solomon in the *Financial Post* entitled, "Ontario's Carpool Embargo." I don't know if it's this piece of legislation or others that he's been working with, but this is about—the subtitle: "With governmental blessings, you can carpool from home to work, but only under certain conditions." Mr. Solomon begins his op-ed by saying:

"Governments want us to maximize carpooling to take excess cars off the road, to save energy, and to clean up the environment, right?

"Wrong, if the government is Ontario and provincial. In Ontario, carpooling is a prohibited activity that can only be allowed under strict government control, as determined by a government regulatory agency set up to oversee such conduct. Those who violate the law—as did a nonplussed outfit called PickupPal—can and will be punished with the full force of the law. With the government's blessings, you can share expenses by carpooling from home to work and back again, but only under certain conditions. You have crossed the line if you try to carpool to work across a municipal boundary—the gov-

ernment frowns upon suburbanites who commute this way. As for carpooling for a frivolous, non-work purpose—to school, to the hockey arena, to the doctor's office—this is outlawed outright, regardless of whether you cross a municipal boundary.

0910

"Ontario places other restrictions, too, on carpooling. First, you must demonstrate dedication by sticking to the same driver, day in day out. You can't catch a ride with Peter on Mondays if Paul picks you up Tuesdays. And you must never, ever be prompt in reimbursing your driver for your share of the ride. Once a week or once a month is fine. Try to pay more frequently and you'll get pulled off to the side of the road if you get caught."

This is in reference to concerns that PickupPal had, which is "an Internet start-up not yet one year old ... a phenom that already operates in over 100 countries, over 1,000 lower-level jurisdictions such as states and provinces, and tens of thousands of municipalities." Ontario is throwing up roadblocks.

I know we have a very sensible, thoughtful Minister of Transportation who reads the *Financial Post*, probably first thing when he wakes up in the morning, and I understand the minister has looked into this issue and is acting upon it. I wanted to commend that and call it to his attention, because maybe we have to realize that we're in a more modern world when it comes to people making arrangements through sites like PickupPal, and we want to ensure that carpooling is encouraged in Ontario.

In conclusion, I will be casting my vote against Bill 126. I appreciate the significant number—in fact, I think, of all the pieces of legislation, right up there with the WSIB bill, I had the most e-mails and Facebook postings on this bill. So I thank all the constituents and others who sent in their comments, and I'm pleased to read in the sample at the Ontario Legislature.

I wanted to commend my colleagues who have as well raised this issue in the Legislature. It seems like we're making some progress, but there is a ways to go, and I will be opposing Bill 126 at second reading.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure to listen to the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook. He raised a number of very good points, especially his example about the young person, aged 19, who is able to fly an airplane with a number of passengers.

I should admit, clearly, the arguments made on this side of the House. The Minister of Transportation, Mr. Bradley, has listened and responded. But there are a couple of small things that our critic, Frank Klees, is still unhappy about. We understand that this is going to committee along with, I think, Bill 118, which is another Highway Traffic Act bill that I'm kind of interested in because it deals with the technology piece—hand-held cellphones.

It's demonstrated here in this bill—these two bills, actually, 118 and 126—that we can improve the legislation by working co-operatively. I think the big thing

that rings clear here is the Premier's admission—he probably forced the Minister of Transportation to push this section in. I don't think it was the will of Mr. Bradley ever to be mean-spirited with young people. He has always been well known and well respected for his regard for others. I would say that he has probably gotten secretly to the Premier to get him to change his mind.

I would only hope, when it does go to hearings, that we look at a couple of the other parts. As I said, the incident management part, I think, is something that's important for congestion as well as road rage and a whole bunch of other things. But it's dealing with the liability of who is going to be responsible for those cleanups, and the insurance companies, and the tow truck operators. It's unnecessarily holding up, you could say, the economy of Ontario during a rough time. So that's a good section of the bill.

I think there's another provision that I'd encourage the minister to look at. When one of my daughters moved back from Australia, she had to reapply to get a G1 licence, even though she had been licensed here and in Australia for 10 years. When she came back, she had to start all over again. She had two little children and she couldn't even bring them to day care or anything without a passenger in the car who had a full G licence.

I think there are reciprocal agreements, provisions in the bill, that I would like to see amendments on.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

There being no further questions and comments, the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I appreciate the comments from my colleague for Durham. He certainly is someone who very keenly follows transportation issues. I commend him for the initiative he brought forward for a tax deduction for those who use transit passes, which in fact became law in Canada, as a whole, with the recent Conservative budget. I congratulate Mr. O'Toole on that initiative.

He and I have had some fun debates about cellphones in cars and appropriate controls. He's also made some progress on safe driving when it comes to cellphones in the vehicle. I thank my colleague for his comments.

I look forward to the debate, particularly from my friend from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, who has had some astute observations and gut reactions to this legislation from the day it was introduced. And I look forward to the vote.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakubuski: I appreciate the opportunity to speak today on Bill 126, and I too will be voting against this piece of legislation.

This legislation was ill-conceived from the start. I want to begin by expressing my deepest sympathy to the families of the three people killed in the car accident that precipitated this bill. I can understand the reaction of Tim Mulcahy to the loss of his son. It's understandable: When someone is grieving, they do things based on emotion.

But I don't understand the reaction of our Premier, because legislation should be based on logic and science, and this piece of legislation never was. You should be ruling and passing laws because they will improve or change things in this province for the better, not because you're playing politics and paying a debt.

What happened to Tyler Mulcahy was a tragedy, but it was not a result of poor law. It was a result of poor judgment and bad decisions. Neither this Legislature nor any other earthly body is going to bring those young men back, but we do have a responsibility to maintain and keep and improve the safety on our highways. This was not going to do that because every existing law was broken that night. New laws were not going to change anything. Those laws were broken that night.

I have some real concerns when a Legislature decides to act like this, and I have even more concerns about how the Premier has conducted himself. You see, this legislation was introduced on November 18, and weeks before that, ads were taken out in newspapers by the family thanking the Premier for his promise to bring in this law.

The Premier announced yesterday that he's decided to withdraw provisions of this law based on discussions with his children. Did he not have any discussions with his children in August and September and October about this law? Why does he dismiss the views and the opinions of the opposition in this Legislature who told him exactly that, that this provision of the law that limited the number of drivers a teen or a novice driver could have with them was absolutely wrong?

He had no interest in that argument at all. As a matter of fact, he told the Minister of Transportation to trot out there and talk about how logical this was. If it is indeed logical, then why is he now promising to withdraw it? Because he never believed it in the first place. He played politics with this Legislature.

This provision would have inflicted terrible consequences on rural Ontario. Carpooling would be a thing of the past. Whether you're a teenager who participates in hockey or wants to simply join with a couple of friends in a responsible way to go to a movie, which in my town is 50 miles away—the nearest movie theatre is 80 kilometres away.

0920

Where was the consultation before this was brought in? I might add that each of the Premier's children would not be affected by this law; they're all over the age of 22. Other people's children would be affected by this law, but there was no consultation with those people on the part of this government.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: So you're objecting to the blood alcohol. Is that it?

Mr. John Yakubuski: There is no part of this bill—the three main provisions—that I support. None. The only part of this bill I will support, with amendments, is the blood-alcohol provision, provided it is based on the lack of experience of a driver, not the age. Under this provision, a person can be of legal age to consume

alcohol but cannot have even a single drop of it in their blood.

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's already in it.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Not at 20 years old, I'm sorry, not at 20 years old. Sorry, you're wrong. So don't say that.

Now we want to base this, not on the experience or lack of experience of a driver; we want to base things on the age of a driver. That is categorically wrong. Those provisions are wrong. We need to base things on the experience, or lack thereof, of a driver. I would certainly support the zero alcohol provision provided it is based on the experience level of the driver.

When the minister was trying to sell this law, he talked about how everybody was supporting it, including the police. Well, we all know that the police are not going to criticize a piece of legislation brought forth by the government that purports to improve road safety. Now that they're withdrawing what was one of the main provisions in this bill, don't expect that the police are going to be out criticizing the minister for withdrawing that provision; it doesn't work that way. But they shouldn't use the police to try to sell their legislation. The police are not going to stand against that bill, even the way it was written. That's not the way they operate, and we all know that. They have a difficult enough job, and they do a very good job of it, but they are not going to stand against a piece of legislation, whether they agree with it or not, that purports to improve road safety.

The carpooling aspect of this bill, which got the most opposition, not only from people on this side of the House but from the general public, just made no sense. It never made any sense from the start, not only from a convenience point of view for many people who live in rural areas and others, but from an environmental point of view and also from the point of view of trying to limit drinking and driving.

Today, you could have several people who are legally of age to drink going to a function with a designated driver. Under the original provision, you might have some of those people getting into a car themselves and driving because they wouldn't be allowed to carpool. Either way, they're breaking the law, but the question is, which one are they going to take the chance on? They can physically be seen to have a group of people in the car. You can't determine just by looking at someone in a car whether or not they're drinking, but you certainly can determine if there are more than two passengers in the car. There might be fear that they are going to get stopped to see if they are of age to be carrying passengers.

So they did withdraw the provision. There's much work to be done on this bill at the committee level. I don't believe we should be bringing emotions into this House to try to improve road safety. It should be based on logic; it should be based on real facts. It is not the design of this Legislature. As I say, there's not a person in this House or anywhere else who doesn't thank the good Lord every day—I do—that they're not in the

position of any of the parents of these young men who were killed in that car accident, or any other. I'm thankful when I get up in the morning and I have not had a visit at the door by the police to tell us something that we don't want to hear. But, unfortunately, those things are still going to continue to happen in this world. We do not live in a perfect world.

We need to make sure that our roads are safe. This party supports any provisions that will make them safer, but we want those laws to be based on good logic, not the emotions of the Premier of the day.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke was very outspoken and quite direct in his assessment of how this bill got here and what the bill intends to do. So I commend him for his directness and, on this side of the House, generally our critic, Mr. Klees, has made it very clear that there are a couple of things—bumping up the age on the blood-alcohol thing is something I would personally support. I think that the better description of age would have been that all novice drivers, regardless of age, should be prohibited from having any substance that could jeopardize their safe driving. So that would be an amendment that I think could easily go through and improve the bill. The intent of the bill, whether it's to address the Mulcahy family or whoever, is to make the roads safer and try to do that in a way that is not impinging totally on people's freedoms.

The member made some very strong arguments, especially speaking on behalf of his constituents who might have to drive 80 kilometres one way to a movie theatre, and how ridiculous the original inclusion in the bill, which has since been withdrawn, on the number of passengers.

Approaching this by improving driver education—it was mentioned in the auditor's comments about strengthening driver training—would be an important way. I would say, have a little module that shows some of the statistics of risk for young or inexperienced drivers, shall we say, not just young drivers, whatever their age, that their probability of being involved in a road incident is very much increased with the lack of experience. So show them the statistics of the number of young people or inexperienced people who are involved in accidents or, indeed, even death on our roads.

These are the things that these debates are about and the public hearings are about, and I look forward to the hearings on this bill so there will be amendments that can help us to support the bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I have the member from Pembroke beside me here, and I'm going to respond to some of his comments. I really appreciate the debate that has taken place, and I always respect the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and the view that he takes of issues. He's a person who travels his constituency

often. He knows the people in the constituency, and therefore knows some of the challenges that they face.

One of the things that I think a lot of people don't realize—I know the member didn't say this—is that there is a prohibition, a zero alcohol content, at the present time up to the age of 19 in graduated licensing. So that is simply being extended to 21, as it is I think in every state of the United States, including those which are predominantly rural. So I have heard that message being put out there.

A lot of these things, as well, are by regulation. The stipulation about the number of passengers in the car was never in the legislation; it was proposed regulatory framework. So that won't even require an amendment.

However, I have appreciated the debate that has taken place. It has been, I think, very constructive. Many times in the Legislature what will happen—and I've been in opposition as well—is that you'll find the debate is simply a partisan rant back and forth. In this particular case, I think there have been some good points put forward. I don't agree with some of them, but there are some good points being put forward.

My friend the member for Durham is usually very moderate in these things. I heard he actually asked the other day for my resignation. I know it was just an emotional outburst at the time, and he doesn't really believe that; I know he doesn't believe that.

I want to thank all the members for their contributions, including the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, who just gave a good speech on the bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

There being none, the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will have two minutes to respond when he returns to his seat.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have returned. I do appreciate the comments from my colleagues. I'm not going to respond directly to them other than to say I am aware of the zero alcohol provision today, but it is just until you have a G licence. You can have a G licence before the age of 18. So for him to say there is a zero tolerance provision to age 19 is not exactly correct; it's until you have a G licence. I think that's an important distinction.

My concern is about novice drivers. The problem I have is that if you are 22 years old today and go to get your licence, you're not affected by any of these provisions. You're still a novice driver. Let's say you have never driven before and you're 45, or my age, 51—

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —I know you don't believe that; I am, honest—you should be under some further restrictions as well, because if you are 51 years old and have never driven, one of the reasons may be that you don't feel comfortable driving. Well, driving safely is a product of being comfortable on the road too, and all experts would agree with that. If you're more nervous on the road, you're more likely to be a poor driver on the road. Experience, education—all those kinds of things that can make our young people or anybody else a better

driver—are what we need to be looking for to improve road safety in this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

There being none, pursuant to the order of the House yesterday, I'm now required to put the question.

On December 3, Mr. Bradley moved second reading of Bill 126. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Pursuant to the order of the House yesterday, the vote is deferred until following question period this morning.

Second reading vote deferred.

Pursuant to the order of the House yesterday, the business of this morning being completed, the House is recessed until 10:30 a.m.

The House recessed from 0933 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It's my pleasure to introduce, in the east members' gallery, Dr. Barbara Alexander and Tony Alexander.

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm delighted to welcome two guests from the great city of Ottawa, Danielle McGee and Adam Decaire. Welcome.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I have a couple of introductions this morning. One is that we have an active member of our Ajax–Pickering youth council in the west members' gallery, but we also welcome the wonderful parents of page Courtney Dodds, from Ajax–Pickering. Her parents, Kim and Karen Dodds, are here. Karen is on her way up the stairs as we speak. Also, very significantly, Courtney's grandparents, Donald and Patricia Dodds, are joining us in the Legislature today in the west members' gallery.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity on behalf of the page Rohan Pavone to welcome his mother, Dr. Rosemarie Lall, sitting in the public gallery this morning. Welcome.

On behalf of page Kush Thaker, his mother Varsha Thaker, is also joining us in the public galleries this morning.

I'd like to welcome a long-time friend of mine in the Speaker's gallery, Mark Cosens. Welcome to Queen's Park, Mark.

ORAL QUESTIONS

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier. Monday's Auditor General's report shows yet again how your government is so quick to rush taxpayers' money

out the door, never even bothering to see what they're getting for it. The auditor called this government for what it is on its training programs, a broken skills training program, noting that less than half of Ontario apprentices actually complete their training and get certified—48%, Premier, the lowest in Canada, a fact that your government apparently never even bothered to keep track of, so the auditor had to do it himself.

Premier, with over 200,000 unemployed manufacturing workers now being forced to consider new careers, will you address the weaknesses identified in the auditor's report and provide an apprenticeship program that actually works?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: I'm very proud of our government's efforts in terms of apprenticeships. At present, we have 50,000 more apprentices learning a trade today than in 2003, and in the skills-to-jobs action centre in the spring we brought forward additional measures in the budget. I was pleased to see that in the Auditor General's report, he recognized that "the ministry has made improvements and been successful in increasing apprenticeship opportunities and registrations over the last several years."

I agree with the Auditor General that we need to put more of an effort into completion rates amongst apprentices. That's something we've been engaged with even before his report came out. In the March budget—and I'll be happy to outline in the supplementary—we outlined a series of measures aimed at completion rates for apprentices, and we have a series of undertakings—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Premier and Minister, your completion rates for apprentices are among the lowest, if not the lowest, in Canada now and your answer is cold comfort to the thousands of Ontarians who are getting pink slips in their Christmas stockings this year. Is it any wonder that completion rates are so low when your government's artificially high apprenticeship ratios mean that apprentices can't get jobs once they've gone through your curriculum? They cannot get jobs with employers in order to get their apprenticeship papers. Your ratios are artificially high.

You'll know, or I hope you know, that Saskatchewan and Newfoundland, as we speak, are lowering their ratios to what we've asked for. You are now going to be alone in Canada with a 3-to-1 ratio, for example, with electricians—three journeymen just to train one apprentice.

So I say to the Premier and the minister: Why at this critical time, when thousands of Ontarians need your help to get a skilled trade, to get into the workforce, are you continuing to put up barriers to their being able to do so?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, I find it passing strange that a member who came from a government that cared very little about apprentices would stand in the House—perhaps he should take a long look in the mirror at his record. The fact of the matter is, we have made apprenticeships a priority. We have 50,000 more apprentices.

The March budget contained measures to increase and enhance the apprenticeship system. Just several months ago, we took the extraordinary step—the first jurisdiction in Canada—to announce a college of trades which is going to go forward and enhance and further improve the apprenticeship system and look at a variety of issues, including completion rates, ratios and the collection of data, to try to get a better understanding of what's going on in the apprenticeship system, to make sure more people enter the system, to make sure they're properly trained and that they complete their training.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'd just like to remind the honourable member of our record: 1.1 million net new jobs created in this province under Mike Harris and Ernie Eves. You say what you want about those governments, but we knew how to create the economic climate so that entrepreneurs and businesspeople could create jobs. You're only able to create public sector jobs. Anybody can do that with a stroke of the pen. You have no strategy. The auditor actually says what we've been saying and my colleagues have been saying on this side of the House for the last two years: You have no strategy. He actually says you have no strategy to properly train people in this—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I realize that the members are very much looking forward to going home for the Christmas holidays. But I remind the members to look to the galleries. We have students here again. We instill in students how to act properly in a classroom. I would urge and remind each member of this Legislature—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): In a classroom, there's respect when the teacher stands up. I would just ask all members—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Welland isn't helping, either.

I would just remind all members to have respect and maintain decorum in this place and then you can have a month and a half to think about all the wonderful things and how well you're going to behave when we return in February. Minister?

Hon. John Milloy: In a spirit of decorum and calmness, I'll let the facts speak for themselves. When the Progressive Conservative government was in power in their first three years in office, there were 37,000 new apprentices registered. When the McGuinty government was in power during our first three years in office we had 60,000 new apprentices come forward. We have made apprenticeship a priority and the announcement of the college of trades is our commitment to further enhance and expand apprenticeships. It's a recognition that we need to look at all aspects of the system, including completions. As I said, the March budget that was brought down contained \$75 million for apprenticeships and

designated the issue of completions and the development of programs and targets as one of the priorities of the use of that money. We will continue to make apprenticeships a cornerstone of this government's knowledge and skills strategy.

SKILLED TRADES DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Jim Wilson: Clearly, the programs aren't working when less than half are actually finishing—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Who is the question to?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Oh, I'm sorry. My question is to the Premier. Premier, clearly your programs aren't working. The Auditor General says the ministry has no strategy to increase registration in high-demand skilled trades, and those are plumbers, electricians and sheet metal workers, to name a few. Yes, you've had registrations. Most registrations have been in the service sector. In addition to that, 8,300 registrations have been in the call centre trades, which are not exactly the highest-paying skilled trades in the province.

So I ask you again: What are you going to do to address the auditor's recommendations that you bring forward a proper strategy and that you actually put to good use the taxpayers' money that you've been spending? Yes, you've been spending a lot of money. You gave \$25 million to the unions that belong to the Working Families Coalition to build training centres, but clearly you're not getting \$25 million worth of training out of those centres; are you?

1040

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister.

Hon. John Milloy: As I said, our government has made apprenticeships a priority and the college of trades is an important step forward. But the member stands and doesn't seem to acknowledge the fact that we live in a changing economy. The fact of the matter is, we need different skill sets; that's why we've expanded the number of apprenticeships that exist out there.

I don't join the honourable member in mocking call centre jobs. The fact of the matter is that the guidelines for apprenticeships in the call centre trades require approximately 4,000 hours of both in-school and on-the-job training, which is similar in guidelines to other trades, such as automotive glass technician, hoisting engineer, roofer and heavy equipment operator.

I think what the Auditor General gives us is good advice on how to move forward, but I'm proud of the fact that we've expanded the number of trades, that we are working with employers to find out where there are gaps—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: You gave \$25 million to the unions that belong to the Working Families Coalition, and we all know about the Working Families Coalition. My question will continue with the minister. They were a group

set up basically to defeat Conservative governments and Conservative parties in Ontario elections.

So I ask you, what are taxpayers getting for the \$25 million? Clearly the auditor, in his own words, says that you have a broken skills training program and that taxpayers aren't getting value for their money. In fact, he had to track how many people were actually finishing the program because your ministry started a project to do that, but, I guess for political reasons, you cancelled it because it was so embarrassing.

Anyway, what are the taxpayers getting for the \$25 million that you've given to your buddies?

Hon. John Milloy: The taxpayers are getting 50,000 more apprentices in the province of Ontario than when we took office. Yes, we have made investments in terms of supporting apprenticeship trade, and I guess the honourable member is opposed to that. He's opposed to the fact that over the summer we invested hundreds of millions of dollars in our community college system so that they could have the types of equipment and facilities needed to put forward training for new apprentices. Yes, we've worked with other partners involved in training—unions, yes; employers, yes; employer-union training centres—to make sure that our apprentices are being trained in the most up-to-date equipment in modern, state-of-the-art facilities. What we got from that is an apprenticeship system that is growing and is continuing to be enhanced. I'll put our record up against their record any day of the week.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Jim Wilson: We know your record. The Auditor General has called it an abysmal failure.

So let's recap: You've given \$25 million to the unions that are members of the Working Families Coalition. That money went for union-operated training centres. We've been telling you since last year that your skills training programs are not working and this week the Auditor General said the same thing. Less than half the people in the programs don't complete them. We've also pointed out that your excessively high apprenticeship ratios are a barrier to job creation, yet you keep giving away millions of dollars to the same unions that are running these failed training programs.

So I ask you again, what did the taxpayers get for their \$25 million to these unions, other than a bunch of Liberal fundraising balls?

Hon. John Milloy: I'm happy to give some examples. Perhaps the member wants to ask his colleague from Burlington about the \$627,000 that went to a Burlington training centre to expand their ability to train construction boilermakers and millwrights on updated equipment meeting industry standards. Perhaps he would like to ask his friend from Sarnia about the \$100,000 that went to a Sarnia training centre to expand their ability to train carpenters. Perhaps he'd like to ask colleagues from Hamilton about \$645,000 to a Hamilton training centre to expand their ability to train welders on updated equipment meeting industry standards. Perhaps he'd like to ask

his friend Mr. Runciman who, when he was minister, said in a press release, "Developing a skilled workforce is key to a strong economic future. Upgrading skills of employees in the heavy equipment industry is vital for the sector." He said it as he gave \$2.3 million to a union training centre.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Premier. Ontario lost 66,000 jobs in November, 42,000 of those in the manufacturing sector. To avoid even more devastating job losses in December and in January of this next year, the McGuinty government needs to take some action now. There is no time to waste.

My question is this: Will the McGuinty government table a jobs stimulus plan in this Legislature before the Christmas break, or does the McGuinty government intend to go on holidays and leave tens of thousands of workers in limbo?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to receive the question, and I will remind my honourable colleague once again of the stimulus efforts that we have in place and that are operating right now, including the \$9.9 billion that we've invested in infrastructure this very year. That is reaching into virtually every Ontario community. It's going into construction projects as we speak, and it's creating up to 100,000 jobs today, when we need them.

I know my honourable colleague well understands that to get a new infrastructure project going often requires extensive planning, followed by an environmental assessment, followed by other processes along the way, and that can mean it takes a long time. But fortunately, years ago, we put in place these kinds of projects. They're taking effect right now; people are working right now.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier talks about infrastructure as if this government is doing something special. I want to send across to the Premier a page out of his own recent fall economic statement, because what it shows is that in this next year the McGuinty government is actually cutting infrastructure spending down to \$7.5 billion. You are cutting it by 23%. This sounds like Jim Flaherty and Stephen Harper: cutting infrastructure spending. That's the real story, and we know what that means. It means fewer jobs. The McGuinty government won't be helping things. The McGuinty government will actually be contributing to a loss of jobs.

My question again is this: Instead of cutting infrastructure spending, is the McGuinty government going to come forward with a jobs stimulus plan, or is the McGuinty government going to continue to see more Ontario workers confined to unemployment?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll let the Minister of Finance, momentarily, speak to the fun with numbers that my colleague is enjoying. But let me speak about some of the infrastructure projects that we have in the riding of

Kenora—Rainy River. We have projects, in that riding alone, in Alberton, Chapple, Dawson, Dryden, Ear Falls, Emo, Fort Frances, Ignace, Kenora, LaVallee, Lake of the Woods, Machin, Morley, Pickle Lake, Rainy River, Red Lake, Sioux Lookout, Sioux Narrows and Nestor Falls, totalling \$4,988,339 this year—money that is at work right now, creating jobs right now.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The fact of the matter is that, when you look at the McGuinty government's own recent fall economic statement, the McGuinty government is not engaging in added capital spending, in added infrastructure spending. The McGuinty government is cutting it by 23%. This sounds like a page borrowed from Jim Flaherty and Stephen Harper, that the McGuinty government is more concerned with looking after itself than it is concerned with looking after workers who are in danger of losing their jobs.

We have given the McGuinty government several ideas: (1) a real Buy Ontario strategy—not 25%, but 50%; (2) raise the minimum wage; and (3) add to infrastructure spending, don't cut infrastructure spending.

Is the Premier going to do something or are we going to see more Ontario workers—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite is not engaging in an accurate read of the financial statements. What he fails to understand is that we booked these expenses a year ago; they're reflected there. And you know what? The construction is going to happen in the coming year, when we expect the economy to be at its worst point.

Since 2003, infrastructure spending has tripled under this government. We have had the ReNew Ontario program—\$5 billion. And the next instalment—10 years, \$60 billion. That, sir, will be the next range of the stimulus that we're going to do.

Finally, I would remind the member opposite that the federal government's Building Canada funds still have not flowed. When they do, these numbers will come up.

What we need is for them to start voting in favour of these programs—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question. The leader of the third party.

1050

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Howard Hampton: I think the McGuinty government's chart speaks for itself: a 23% cut in infrastructure spending at a time when we need to be adding more jobs, not cutting them.

To the Premier: Today marks the 60th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Sadly, the McGuinty government continues to violate this declaration. The UN is clear: Inade-

quate social assistance rates in Canada constitute a violation of the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Social assistance incomes in Ontario have fallen by 30% since 1992—more than in any other province—and 675,000 Ontarians on welfare and disability support are forced to live in poverty.

My question: When is the McGuinty government going to stop violating the human rights of these Ontario citizens?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Well, there's always a real issue when it comes to poverty in Ontario.

The first thing that we did was we abandoned the NDP government's policy of freezing those rates. We've raised social assistance rates four times so far.

I think it's important to understand that there are also new sources of income that go into our low-income households now. A single mom with two kids on social assistance is now earning \$3,700 more as a result of new benefits, most of those beyond social assistance. A single mom with two children earning minimum wage will now take home 54% more than in 2003. So there have been some real improvements, whether you're on social assistance or find yourself in a low-income household, and those supports go beyond simply social assistance itself.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Those who study the situation have far different figures than the Premier. In 2007 dollars, in Ontario, between 1992 and 2007, a lone parent's social assistance benefit declined by \$5,500, or 25%; and a couple with two children saw a loss of benefit of almost \$8,150, or 28%.

The Premier says that his government has increased benefits. Yes, the Premier has increased his own pay by about 40%. After you factor in inflation and after you factor in the federal child benefit, the increase under the McGuinty government for somebody on social assistance has been about 4% over five years.

I ask again, when is the McGuinty government going to stop abusing—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, they froze social assistance; we have increased it four times. Beyond that, we've introduced something new. It's called the Ontario child benefit. That's what's very important: new supports for our families. Beyond that as well, we've just put in place, for the first time ever in Ontario, a poverty reduction strategy with a specific target to reduce child poverty by 25% over five years. That will lift 90,000 children out of poverty.

It's one thing to come up with \$300 million in a growing economy; it's another thing to come up with \$300 million in the middle of a global economic crisis. We've done that for all the right reasons, but perhaps most importantly because we believe we have a shared responsibility to help out families where kids are growing up in poverty.

All those are new measures, and we believe they will be effective.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government had five years of good economic growth, and what happened? What happened is this: A person trying to live on social assistance is actually \$5,500 behind where they were in 1992. What happened to a husband and wife and two kids? They're \$8,150 behind where they were in 1992, and the Premier says this is progress.

Premier, the other factor is this: You keep talking about your child benefit. The child benefit isn't going to do anything until 2011. If you factor in increases in the cost of electricity, increases in the cost of heating fuel, the fact of the matter is, it's not going to make a huge difference then. My question remains: When is the McGuinty government going to stop—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I don't want to underestimate the size of the challenge before us, and I don't want to underestimate the goodwill on the part of Ontarians of all political stripes to apply themselves and to find a way to move forward, but I think it's important to recognize, in honest fashion, our achievements. There is a new Ontario child benefit in place. It is providing, for the first time ever, \$600 per child. That benefit will continue to grow till 2011, when it reaches \$1,100, on an annual basis, per child.

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My friends ridicule that. They won't even support that, but we think it's an important step forward in combination with our poverty strategy—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. New question.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. On a number of occasions, I've raised the issue of the importance of government coming to the support of businesses, particularly the manufacturing sector in this province. The minister and the Premier have referred, for example, to the Next Generation of Jobs Fund, which I have attempted to help some of my constituents make application to. I'd like the Premier to share with us what the possible reason would be why the details regarding the number of applicants to that program, the number of applications that have been approved and the amount of money that has been paid out under that program are so secretive and why members of this Legislature are not allowed to have that information. Could the Premier please tell us?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Michael Bryant: That's just complete nonsense. The member knows very well, because he asked the

Minister of Economic Development during committee hearings, during estimates, which is the time to ask those questions and get those answers, a whole host of questions for hours and hours, I do believe. In fact, it was something like eight or nine hours, and the minister answered all the questions and provided all the information about that very program.

The member is right. It is a very important program that requires accountability, that involves a lot of dollars. The government has to be careful in the way in which it spends dollars. But let's be clear: Those dollars that the member is opposed to—this is a program that the member is opposed to—leverage, in fact, millions and millions of dollars of investment from other companies and literally thousands of jobs, and that's why this government is doing it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: First of all, I'm not opposed to the program at all. Premier, here's what I did. I put on the table a specific question on the order paper. I asked the following questions:

“—a detailed list of the applications that have been made by Ontario business to access the Next Generation of Jobs Fund;

“—a detailed list of the approved applications; and

“—a detailed list of the government funding that has actually been disbursed to each approved applicant.”

In response to that order paper question, this minister provided me with the following answer: “I would refer you to the Ministry of Economic Development's website.” There is nothing on that website that comes even close to the questions I have asked. What is the minister hiding? Why can't members of this Legislature have that kind of very specific question answered—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Firstly, the member says that he supports the program. Then I ask the member, why did you vote against it? When you had an opportunity to vote for it, you voted against it.

Secondly, as the member knows very well, for the government of Ontario to release information that involves commercially sensitive information about companies—companies that are in competition with other companies; companies that may not want to release the information that they in fact are applying for the Next Generation of Jobs Fund, information about the companies themselves and the dollar figures being sought.

There's no question that this government is using the Next Generation of Jobs Fund to create greater investments and to create greater jobs. I know that the member is against that, but this government is for it and we will continue to do it.

1100

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Why is this minister repeatedly forcing municipalities to the financial wall in

order to compensate for her total lack of child care funding in this province—not even to expand child care, but simply to maintain affordable spaces in Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me start by just rejecting the premise of the question altogether. In fact, we are making some very good progress on improving child care for families in this province.

Our next big step, as the member opposite knows, is to bring full-day learning to four- and five-year-olds. This is a very, very progressive initiative. Dr. Charles Pascal is out consulting widely on the best way to implement full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds. It will make a very big difference—not just for the kids, but also for their families. It will also increase the number of child care spaces available to those younger children.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This minister has shown an appalling lack of commitment to child care in this province. Families in Ottawa were on the brink of seeing 700 subsidized child care spaces disappear just last week, but for the help of the municipality, councillors and citizens who fought against that cut.

She talks about a plan for full-day learning. When is that plan coming? Sometime on the horizon. It's not coming soon enough, and everybody knows it—every child and every parent knows it.

Passing the buck, whether it's the buck being passed to Ottawa or the buck being passed to some full-day learning program that's not even on the horizon, is inappropriate and inadequate.

Why won't this minister commit right now to adequate, stable core funding required to meet the needs of Ontario's children and families?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me take this opportunity to educate not just the member opposite, but all Ontarians, on some of the initiatives that we have made.

We have created 22,000 more child care spaces since we were elected. This year alone, we have expanded the number of people who are able to get subsidies for their child care: We invested \$23 million this year so that 3,000 more families could get subsidies.

We know that parents need their kids to be in good, high-quality child care so that their kids can thrive and so that the parents can work. We are committed to continually improving child care.

The work of Charles Pascal is well underway. The member opposite knows that he will be reporting in the spring. The early learning adviser is doing a tremendous job—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: My question is for the Minister of Health.

I know that our government is committed to giving Ontarians access to quality health care and that modernizing our health care system depends on modernizing our hospitals.

On October 28, 2008, Brampton saw the decommissioning of Peel Memorial Hospital. The 83-year-old hospital was out of date; it no longer met current building, environmental and safety codes.

My community is eagerly anticipating the site's redevelopment in downtown Brampton. I understand that the Central West Local Health Integration Network and the William Osler hospital are working on a proposal to redevelop the Peel site. Can the Minister of Health tell the House about the current status of the Peel Memorial Hospital project?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member from Brampton-Springdale. She is quite correct, the Central West Local Health Integration Network and William Osler Health Centre are working to further develop the proposal for this project.

Our government recognizes that there's a need for the redevelopment at the Peel Memorial site. That's why we have included this particular project as part of our Re-New Ontario five-year infrastructure investment plan. We want to ensure that the new Peel Memorial will serve the community's needs. That's why the local health integration network, the hospital and a task force have been partnered to develop the first stage of the capital planning process: a business case, including a master program and a master plan. I anticipate receiving and reviewing the business case proposal from the LHIN and from the hospital and then taking the next steps.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I'm really glad to hear this project is moving forward. It's very important to my constituents. Like most Ontarians, Bramptonians want to receive quality care close to home. Hospitals play a key role in maintaining the economic vitality and quality of life in our communities. Brampton is still growing quickly, and I know that many of my residents are concerned about access to health care. I want to ensure that my constituents get the care they need. Can the Minister of Health tell this House about the health care supports that are currently available in Brampton?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member. I certainly want to recognize the advocacy of this member and all the members from Brampton and Peel. I want to assure the House and members of the community that we are maintaining access to high-quality care in the Brampton community. Since the Brampton Civic Hospital opened last year, we've added more than 110 beds and three new operating rooms; in addition, we introduced new services for children and adolescent mental health. We are also increasing access to care in the Brampton community. Our province-wide, \$1.1-billion aging-at-home strategy is helping to ensure that seniors in Brampton and, indeed, around the province can get the care they need closer to home.

Since 2003, we've opened more than 460 long-term-care beds in Brampton alone. This year we've increased funding for long-term care by over \$300 million. I'm proud of the investments and confident that the residents of Brampton will continue to have access—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question?

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Minister of Finance: As you know, Mercer, a respecting consulting firm, has said that the typical pension plan is experiencing at least a 30% shortfall, and that was as of September. They anticipate it has become much worse.

In estimates committee on October 29 and again on November 4, I asked you directly, as well as Bob Christie, the superintendent of financial services, to update the committee on the status of the public pensions in the province of Ontario. Minister, we have not heard back from you yet. You know this is a very serious issue. Could you tell the assembly what the shortfall is for the public funds like teachers, OMERS, HOOPP, and what kind of liability taxpayers are on the hook for?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I remind the member he will be getting responses to his questions according to the rules established by the Legislature. We will have some things to say about pension solvency rules, probably very shortly. There is no doubt markets are down about 40%. As you know, pension funds are invested in a diversity of assets, so that doesn't necessarily reflect what has happened in the individual pension accounts. But the issue for government now—and we'll look forward to the opposition's response—is how we respond in terms of things like solvency rules, how our response will compare to what Mr. Flaherty said in his fall statement and how that will reflect the attitudes and values that this government has versus others, and it will reflect advice we've had from Mr. Arthurs.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: The minister gave me a technical answer in response. The minister knows that retired civil servants and taxpayers are very concerned about the shortfall in the public pension funds, and I would expect an answer from the minister under these circumstances a lot faster than two months later.

The minister also knows that during this tough economic time many companies, facing steep payments to pension top-ups to meet solvency requirements, would perhaps take funds out of cash flow or investments, already exacerbating a dire jobs picture in the province of Ontario. Over 200,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs have fled Ontario under Dalton McGuinty. The federal government has moved the time frame from five years to 10 years, subject to the agreement of the retirees, of the pension members, and with a line of credit from a financial institution. What is Ontario's plan, because most of the pensions fall under your jurisdiction, sir?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member is accurate about what the federal government has announced. There are a number of other measures that we believe should be undertaken that have not been undertaken by the federal government. Premier McGuinty will have more to say

about this early next week, I suspect, in terms of our government's full response.

I appreciate the tenor of the member's question; it's a legitimate question; it's a valuable question. It wasn't designed, obviously, to create any kind of fear among pensioners and others. I'll look forward to his response and the response of both opposition parties when the Premier makes that announcement, likely next week.

1110

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Education. Was the final offer presented by the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario on Friday, December 5, within the government's financial parameters for four-year collective agreements, as the teachers claim?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As the member opposite knows, there were a number of offers and discussions that went back and forth between ETFO, the Elementary Teachers' Federation, and OPSBA, which is the public school boards' association. There was no agreement that the two parties could come to. There was no offer that had the stamp of approval of the government, because the only offer that would have been acceptable to the government was one that, yes, was within the fiscal requirements but also was agreed to by both the boards and the teachers. Unfortunately, both parties left \$800 million on the table. They could not come to an agreement, and it's most unfortunate.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Minister, you were there when the negotiations collapsed. This is your framework. With so much at stake, not to mention peace and stability, why did you not intervene and get a deal?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Of 23 potential agreements across the province with different groups—22 have reached agreements. So I actually believe that this government has been extremely successful in building strong working relationships with everyone in the education sector.

It takes two parties to come to an agreement; it takes two parties to come to an impasse. Unfortunately, there was nothing that could be done in that moment to bring the two parties together. The deadline passed, and unfortunately, the \$800 million was not enough and there was not enough agreement to come to a resolution on Friday night.

RURAL ONTARIO

Mr. Jim Brownell: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Rural communities have made important contributions to the tapestry of this province, and all signs point toward rural Ontario playing a valued role in its future development. In this electronic age, rural Ontario has a voice like never before, and those in our urban centres are becoming

more informed about the benefits of our rural communities. E-mail, Internet, video conferencing, Black-Berrys: These tools have provided the residents of our rural communities with unprecedented connection to the rest of the province and the rest of the world.

Minister, I know that you have worked tirelessly to ensure that rural Ontario has remained connected in this province and also to raise awareness of the issues that face our rural communities.

What has the government of Ontario done to ensure that rural Ontario has the access to technologies and resources that will help them to be a strong voice in today's global society?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I want to thank the honourable member. Our government has certainly been working very hard with our rural communities to understand how we can enable them to develop rural economies. That is why, in last year's budget, we committed \$30 million over the next four years to further expand and enhance broadband access within our rural areas. I'm very happy to say that on November 28 of this year, 15 successful projects were announced, and that represents an investment of \$8.8 million.

The good news is that we continue to offer for applications. Intake, too, for accessing these resources will close on February 12, 2009.

Rural Connections builds on the \$10-million investment that we made in 2007. We very much look forward to hearing from more rural municipalities that are—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Brownell: Again to the minister: Recently, I was very pleased to announce that in collaboration with OMAFRA and their Rural Connections program, three townships in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry will soon have increased access to broadband Internet. After this program is implemented, the broadband coverage in the township of South Glengarry will increase access to the point where 95% to 99% of residents and businesses can be served. This initiative will also provide 100% broadband coverage to Ault Island in the townships of South Stormont and South Dundas.

The Rural Connections program is just one of the initiatives that has shown the commitment of this government to ensure that rural Ontario is not only represented in the growth of this province but will play an integral role in its development.

Minister, can you please tell this House about some of the other programs available to assist rural Ontario in remaining essential in today's society?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I think it's really important that people in this Legislative Assembly understand how hard we work with our municipal partners, enabling them to have economic development occur in our rural communities. The rural broadband program requires that they build partnerships in their communities, and this has been very successful.

I would also say that we know how integral infrastructure is to attracting economic development, and to build on that, we have the rural economic development program. Since we came to government, there have been 192 projects approved with our rural economic development program. We're helping rural communities with broadband access and, when they have broadband access, they are able then to develop partnerships through our rural economic development program.

I will say that, to date, we have invested \$63 million in rural communities. That has generated some \$573 million in new economic activity right across rural communities in Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

UNIVERSITY LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Premier. Your Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities has stonewalled my questions on the York University strike from the moment I rose in this Legislature and asked the first one, weeks ago. He says I haven't any exclusivity on concern, but it's not about me, Premier. If the strike is not resolved within the next few days, 2008 is lost and, once the House shuts down tomorrow, there is no legislative recourse for 50,000 students. Our party is prepared to sit tomorrow morning, when nothing is scheduled for debate, to deal with back-to-work legislation. Are you prepared to introduce it, save the year for these people and not waste millions at a time when that's just unacceptable? Will you do it, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: I repeat that I think every member in the Legislature is concerned about the situation at York University. We continue to ask and encourage both sides to come to the table for an agreement that's in the best interests of the students, and to come to that agreement quickly. But at the same time, I think the honourable member has to recognize that, despite his questions that he raises in the House, ultimately universities are autonomous. This government believes in the collective bargaining process, and we continue to encourage both sides to follow that process and reach an agreement as quickly as possible.

Mr. Peter Shurman: The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities sounds self-righteous to me. He has no concern—no concern for the student body of York University, for the striking workers either, and his worker retraining programs are a farce too. He has no business in this portfolio; he has no business in this House. If something as rudimentary as resolving a highly punitive strike at a mainstream university is, in his opinion, in the autonomous hands of the university and the administration and not his problem, then he should resign. Fifty thousand students need help, and that's what this minister should be offering.

I ask again: Will this minister and this government end the nonsense, or will the minister get out of the way and allow someone to take the job seriously?

Hon. John Milloy: I've been very proud to be part of a government that has made post-secondary education one of its hallmarks. I've been very proud to serve with a Premier who made one of the largest investments in post-secondary education in our history. I am concerned about the situation at York University, as is every member of this Legislature, and despite the member's theatrics, I think he recognizes that universities are autonomous institutions, and we have a collective bargaining system in this province. That means sometimes there are strikes. That is unfortunate, and we call on both sides to get back to the table and to resolve this dispute as quickly as possible, in the best interests of those students at York University.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order. The member from Dufferin-Caledon.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The clock is stopped.

The member for Welland.

1120

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Peter Kormos: I have a question to the Minister of Health. Down in Niagara, there's a crisis in mental health care. There are no beds for children and youth with urgent mental health needs and the emergency adult facilities for mental health treatment have been recently cut in half. Why does the McGuinty government find this acceptable?

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, I disagree with the premise of the question. There is nothing acceptable about a mental health system—in fact, we seek to improve on the foundation which we found when we assumed office in 2003.

To review a little bit of context: Back when my friend was a minister of a previous government, funding for mental health was cut not simply in Niagara region but around the province some \$23 million, in 1992; again, in 1994 and 1995, a further \$42-million cut by the member opposite and by his colleagues. There was no base increased funding under the previous government for eight years.

Upon assuming office, we have since invested an additional \$200 million into mental health and to expand services. I acknowledge there is much more to do. One of the reasons why I've supported the call from my colleague opposite from Whitby-Oshawa for a select committee—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Kormos: The cuts I refer to have been made since this government was elected. Just recently, a

14-year-old child had to be admitted into an adult psychiatric facility because there are no beds for emergency treatment of youth and children.

The Auditor General's report refers to the tragic and condemnable patchwork of services for children and youth with mental health issues. We don't even have a patchwork down in Niagara. Why won't this government adequately fundamental mental health services for children and youth in Niagara?

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, funding has increased some 66%, a two-thirds increase in funding, over what we've seen previously. So I think the member's characterization is quite false and unfortunate, for the member to be able to make—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Withdraw the comment, please.

Hon. David Caplan: I'll withdraw it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Hon. David Caplan: It's certainly unfortunate that the member would characterize inaccurately the kind of investments that we have seen from this government, particularly in light of his own conduct and his support for absolute cuts to the mental health services in this province.

In fact, in this year, in 2007-08, we've invested \$640 million for the provision of community mental health services in Ontario, and a year later, we're enhancing mental health service funding with a new annualized funding of an additional \$40 million.

I acknowledge that there is more to do. That is why I've called together an advisory from around the province on ways to address many of the gaps.

ROAD SAFETY

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Road safety is a priority for our government. Recently, much of the discussion has been around the introduction of Bill 118, which, if passed, will prohibit the use of hand-held wireless communication devices while driving. In addition, you have introduced Bill 126, which proposes extending the graduated licensing program from two years to three, and implementing zero blood-alcohol concentration for drivers aged 21 and under. However, I know that there is more to be done.

Can the minister please share with this House what else his ministry is doing to address road safety?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I want to thank the member for a very good question. She'll know that one of the areas where we listened to the concerns of the public was on the issue of the speed of trucks. Therefore we passed in this Legislature speed limiter legislation, which would put a regulation forward to not allow trucks to go in excess of 105 kilometres per hour. That was supported, by the way, by the Ontario Trucking Association and many organizations in the United States. What we're doing there is, we're working closely with the province of Quebec to implement this on exactly the same day. That will

be January 1, 2009. There will be an educational period to allow carriers, particularly those outside of Canadian jurisdictions and the US, to bring the vehicles they operate into Ontario and Quebec into compliance with the new speed limiter rule.

As you would recognize, there are also—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Again my question is for the Minister of Transportation. I'm pleased to hear that there will be an educational period on this important change for large trucks, and I agree that this initiative will help improve the safety of our roads.

Minister, the seasons are changing. With winter here and the weather getting worse, driving conditions can change almost instantly. With this change in weather we also see an increase in accidents on our highways. Could the Minister of Transportation share with this House and my constituents of Hamilton Mountain just what his ministry is doing to keep our roads safe for winter driving?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Again, another good question. Our winter maintenance standards are among the highest in all of North America, with the current technology, the tools, the methods to keep roads safe for winter driving. They include the following: a road and weather information system to forecast and monitor conditions; changeable message signs that warn drivers of poor weather; and liquid salt solutions that are used to prevent black ice and snow from bonding with the pavement.

But as Cam Woolley used to say when he was with the OPP—and still says on television—and Commissioner Fantino has said on many occasions, it's still important for all of us, as drivers, to take into account winter conditions: not to go out on the roads when it's recommended that we don't go on the roads if we don't have to; to drive more slowly; to watch for any eventuality that may cause great problems for—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Minister, for months you have told me and the people of Halton that our hospital is delayed because of a lack of capacity. You have consistently said that there are not enough bidders to ensure a competitive procurement process. Yet it appears to me that you are simply assuming this. It appears to me that you have not even begun the request-for-qualifications process.

Minister, if you have not sought applications or even surveyed the possible bidders, how on earth can you say that there's a shortfall in capacity?

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member is thinking in the right direction on this point about the survey of actual bidders. Through the work of Infra-

structure Ontario, which is managing the development of the large-scale projects—19 of which are currently under construction in the province of Ontario—we have been working with those large general contractors, which are relatively small in number, to coordinate bringing to life new projects in a fashion that is timely and within their capabilities. So, indeed, the resequencing on the Oakville hospital and the hospital in Markham were related to a sophisticated conversation about general construction capability with those very same companies.

In a recent meeting with the chair of Halton region, I made that commitment, as I've made in the presence of my friend and colleague Kevin Flynn in Oakville, that it's our effort, with the Oakville community, to move forward as fast as possible the initiation of construction related to that project.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Minister, we're talking about the health of my constituents here, so the only answer I'm prepared to accept right now is that we will begin the process in Oakville immediately.

Since 2004 in Peel, to the east of Halton, there have been over \$1 billion invested in health care infrastructure. The Trillium hospital and Credit Valley Hospital have both been expanded, just like the hospitals to the west of us in Hamilton, where all three Hamilton hospitals have been expanded.

Minister, in Halton there's a dearth of expansion. It's surrounded by new, expanding hospitals. But in Halton is the fastest-growing community in Canada—in the whole country—and yet your government hasn't spent one red cent in expansion in either Oakville or Milton.

What's wrong with the people of Halton? Why don't they deserve the same health care as other people in Ontario? Why don't you start the RFQ process to get the hospital started at this time?

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, what the honourable member is not in a good position to do on any of these fronts is talk about any investments that occurred through the eight years that he was a privileged member of a caucus.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Where is the Oakville hospital?

Hon. George Smitherman: It's very, very important that the—

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Tell us the truth.

Hon. George Smitherman: Now, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just ask the honourable member for Halton to withdraw the comment, please.

1130

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I can't withdraw that if he's not going to stand in front of this House—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment, please.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I will not withdraw that as long as he will not start that process. The people of Oakville deserve a new hospital—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): For the third time, I'll ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment. Will the honourable member withdraw the com-

ment? I have no other recourse, then, but to name the member, Ted Chudleigh, from Halton.

Mr. Chudleigh was escorted from the chamber.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question. The member for Timmins—James Bay.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Member for Eglinton—Lawrence and the member for Durham—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Throw them out.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): —and the member for Peterborough.

The member for Timmins—James Bay.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: As long as you're not throwing me out, Speaker, I'll be all right.

My question is to the Minister of Transportation. You'll know that the US economy is tanking; ours is following suit. There are 30,000 independent trucker owner-operators who are really feeling the pinch in this economy, but your government is moving full steam ahead with the speed limiters on trucks. They're going to have to drive 105 kilometres in jurisdictions in the United States, where their speed limiters are set way ahead of that number. At the very time that truckers need our support, why is your government forcing them to spend \$4.5 million for technology that won't make our roads safer and will make it even harder for those truckers to compete against American competitors?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm surprised to hear the member actually ask that question—he asks so many good questions in the House—because the statistics show very clearly that speed limiter legislation and the regulations that go with it will in fact increase road safety tremendously. The Ontario Trucking Association, which represents most of the truckers in Ontario, was very enthusiastic about this being implemented. Next door, in the province of Quebec, they have already passed legislation and will, in synchronization with Ontario, be implementing this on January 1, 2009. This will have a profound, positive effect not only on highway safety, but your fellow colleagues who are concerned about the environment will know that this is very positive for greenhouse gases and for other emissions that are forthcoming from large vehicles—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, if you're disappointed in my question, I can tell you that independent truckers are disappointed in your answer and would expect a much better answer from the Minister of Transportation.

Listen. The experts have come before committee and they've said when it comes to making our highways safer, this legislation in fact will make it more dangerous because of the requirement of speed limiters. Number two, and here is the big issue, they are going to have to compete against American truckers—also independent truckers and fleets—at a disadvantage because their

speed limiters are set at higher speeds due to the speed limits in the United States.

So I ask you again, will you not support the independent truckers of this province and allow them to compete on a level playing field, or at the very least pay for the installation of the technology?

Hon. James J. Bradley: As you know, the technology is such that it can be changed according to the jurisdiction you are in. So that can happen.

But I want to share with the member—I know he is interested in facts—increased road safety: Research shows that excessive speed is a factor in 23% of crashes; 100 million fewer litres of diesel fuel will be used by the whole trucking industry; a 280,000-tonne reduction in greenhouse gas emissions is the equivalent of 2,700 tractor-trailers off the road each year.

Now, your friend who is competing with you for the leadership of the party, Mr. Tabuns, is not going to be happy with that question. I have a quote. I remember you said this. On March 19, 2008, you were very good when you said, “In principle, we don’t have a problem.” I agreed with you then and I still agree with that statement—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Time for question period has ended.

We have a deferred vote on Bill 126. Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1135 to 1140.

DEFERRED VOTES

ROAD SAFETY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ ROUTIÈRE

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 126, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and to make consequential amendments to two amending acts / *Projet de loi 126, Loi modifiant le Code de la route et apportant des modifications corrélatives à deux lois modificatives.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Bradley has moved second reading of Bill 126. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Best, Margaret
Bisson, Gilles
Bradley, James J.
Brotten, Laurel C.
Brown, Michael A.
Brownell, Jim
Bryant, Michael
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David

Duncan, Dwight
Fonseca, Peter
Gerretsen, John
Gélinas, France
Gravelle, Michael
Horwath, Andrea
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Kormos, Peter
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
Mangat, Amrit

Meilleur, Madeleine
Miller, Paul
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol
Naqvi, Yasir
Phillips, Gerry
Qaadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Monique
Smitherman, George
Sousa, Charles

Colle, Mike
Craitor, Kim
Crozier, Bruce
Dickson, Joe
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad

Marchese, Rosario
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McGuinty, Dalton
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil

Takhar, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Elliott, Christine
Hardeman, Ernie
Hillier, Randy
Hudak, Tim
Jones, Sylvia

Klees, Frank
MacLeod, Lisa
Miller, Norm
Munro, Julia
O'Toole, John
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Savoline, Joyce

Scott, Laurie
Shurman, Peter
Sterling, Norman W.
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth
Yakubski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 60; the nays are 20.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on General Government.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I seek consent for the House to take the routine proceeding reports by committees immediately; following which the orders for second and third reading of bills Pr19 and Pr20 shall be called consecutively, the questions on the motions for second and third reading of the bills being put immediately, without debate; and that Ms. Jeffrey may move the motions for second and third readings of the bills on behalf of Mr. Dhillon and Mr. Sorbara respectively.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Paul Miller: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill Pr20, An Act respecting the Joseph and Wolf Lebovic Jewish Community Campus.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ABLE INSURANCE BROKERS LTD. ACT, 2008

Mrs. Jeffrey, on behalf of Mr. Dhillon, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr19, An Act to revive Able Insurance Brokers Ltd.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

ABLE INSURANCE BROKERS LTD. ACT, 2008

Mrs. Jeffrey, on behalf of Mr. Dhillon, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr19, An Act to revive Able Insurance Brokers Ltd.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

JOSEPH AND WOLF LEBOVIC
JEWISH COMMUNITY
CAMPUS ACT, 2008

Mrs. Jeffrey, on behalf of Mr. Sorbara, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr20, An Act respecting the Joseph and Wolf Lebovic Jewish Community Campus.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

JOSEPH AND WOLF LEBOVIC
JEWISH COMMUNITY
CAMPUS ACT, 2008

Mrs. Jeffrey, on behalf of Mr. Sorbara, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr20, An Act respecting the Joseph and Wolf Lebovic Jewish Community Campus.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There being no further business, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1147 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: It is a privilege and honour to welcome Bill Nemerson, who is 80 years young and a

great community activist for the community of Etobicoke, joined, of course, by his loving family, entourage and supporters. Welcome, Mr. Nemerson.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: It's my privilege to introduce to the House today the president of Redeemer University College, Dr. Justin Cooper, who is here with us, and Mr. Peter Curtis.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. John O'Toole: This morning, our member Jim Wilson, who is the PC critic for the training, colleges and universities ministry, asked the minister to explain why less than 50% of the apprentices actually completed their training. This, following the Ontario Auditor General's report which stated that Ontario provides "\$227 million in grants to unemployed individuals to help learn new skills." It went on to say, "In essence, it's not clear what bang the government got for its buck." The minister did not have an effective strategy, he went on to say.

Also Mr. Klees, our member, asked Mr. Bryant publicly about the take-up of the Second Career funds, and the minister gave him no clear response. With the collapse in the Ontario economy, we need to be more effective in job training, as noted by the Attorney General.

In my riding of Durham, the ACE program, which is a grade 12 equivalency certification, has been widely supported. However, the ACE program has been cancelled in Bowmanville due to lack of funding. I want the McGuinty government to ensure that job training programs like ACE get the funding they need, the people they need and the support they need for jobs in the future. It's like all ridings in the province of Ontario: suffering job losses. Retraining is important, and it appears that the McGuinty government has no plan that's working and no way of measuring the outcomes of those plans.

RHENISH CHURCH OF CANADA

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I recently had the pleasure of attending the dedication service for the new Rhenish church located in my riding of Oak Ridges-Markham. Initially brought to China from Germany by missionaries, the Rhenish Church was established in Canada by immigrants from China in 1984. A member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, it has since grown exponentially in membership and has established itself in Cornell in Markham, in a very pleasant park-like setting.

The event began outdoors, where Bishop Michael Pryse of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Eastern Synod, and Rhenish Church senior pastor the Rev. David Tin presided over the official opening of the doors and the unveiling of the church's new sign. A gathering of approximately 300 church members from across the greater Toronto area then proceeded inside to

celebrate the impressive new building with its first service. A wonderful choir of young children sang hymns of joy, to the delight of all. The event was marked by a palpable sense of pride in the new church, which had been the focus of much fundraising, planning and hard work. That pride carried over to the heritage house located on the church's land, which has been preserved by church members and is now home to a youth group and other community activities.

I would like to extend my congratulations to the Rhenish Church of Canada on their new church, which will undoubtedly be enjoyed by the community for years to come.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

Mr. Kuldip Kular: It gives me great pleasure to rise today to discuss the McGuinty government's latest initiatives to enhance Ontario's outstanding cultural sector. This government recognizes that investing in arts and culture not only builds strong, sustainable and vibrant communities, but also greatly contributes to our economic prosperity.

Ontario's cultural sector generates almost \$20 billion for the provincial economy and creates over 250,000 jobs, which the McGuinty government has taken important steps to not only sustain but to ensure that it flourishes. Some of these initiatives include increasing the Ontario Arts Council's annual funding by \$20 million. This has increased the OAC's budget to \$56 million this year and, when fully implemented, this will represent a 140% increase in OAC funding since 2003. We have also increased our domestic film and television tax credits to 35%, and for foreign film productions we have increased the tax credit to 25%. We are the first government in 30 years to strengthen the Ontario Heritage Act, giving municipalities the tools needed to identify, designate and protect their historic treasures.

These investments in various arts programs display the level of the McGuinty government's belief in Ontario's cultural sector and work hard to provide it with the tools to sustain—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The member for Toronto—Danforth.

HERITAGE CONSERVATION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Today I was contacted by the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario and told that another piece of Ontario's heritage, the Erie Street United Church, dating from 1876, located in Ridgetown, Ontario, is going to be demolished. Once again, the Minister of Culture has failed in her responsibility to protect Ontario's heritage.

The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario requested that she issue a stop order to save this Henry Langley church, designated by the municipality. Ministry staff were in contact with the chief building officer and the local congregation and managed to negotiate a two-day pause but couldn't get a voluntary agreement to stop.

The congregation can't afford to maintain the building; it needs about \$1 million in repairs. But as one of the engineer's reports said, the building would last another 300 years if it had been maintained. The chief building officer was persuaded to issue a demolition order. The minister had the power—and a request—to issue a stop on that. She didn't.

We lost Alma College in St. Thomas—lost to fire—after the minister refused to act. At the rate the minister is going, we'll see an awful lot more buildings lost in this province.

AMBULANCE SERVICES

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I am pleased to share with the members of the Legislature how the McGuinty government is continuing to build strong relationships with our municipal partners, including in my hometown of Ottawa.

I hear from my constituents in Ottawa Centre how pleased they are to see us working together with our municipal representatives to address the concerns and issues of importance to them. Through the work of community members, the positive tone and tenor of the relationship has resulted in much-needed financial investment in the city of Ottawa.

Just this past Friday, our government announced the 2009 allocation of the 50-50 municipal land ambulance funding. Due to this announcement, the city of Ottawa is receiving an additional \$765,239 to maintain the 50-50 cost-sharing agreement. In total, the government will deliver more than \$408 million in province-wide funding for municipal land ambulance operating costs, an increase of \$20.1 million from 2008.

The investment numbers alone do not tell the real story. This investment means an additional 38 new paramedics and five additional vehicles for the ambulance service in Ottawa. Our government truly understands the importance of having land ambulance services that our residents can count on.

I am pleased that the McGuinty government continues to work diligently with our municipal partners in bettering the lives of and services for all Ontarians.

TRANSFER PAYMENTS

Mr. Bill Mauro: Thunder Bay—Atikokan has greatly benefited from the substantial investments of our provincial government. The enhanced investments at our three main hospitals in Thunder Bay—Atikokan are a testament to our government's commitment.

Atikokan General has seen an increase in base funding from 2003-04 of 30% or \$1.4 million; Thunder Bay Regional has witnessed an increase of 38% and \$46.1 million; and St. Joseph's Care Group's funding has grown by \$13.8 million, or 20%. That is a total increase of over \$61 million, or 30%, in base funding.

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Our government is making substantial investments to help expand and improve public transit services. For

example, Thunder Bay has received well over \$6 million in gas tax funding from the province since 2004. Thunder Bay–Atikokan has also received well over \$11 million this past fall to move ahead with infrastructure priorities such as improving roads and bridges, expanding transit and upgrading social housing as a result of the Investing in Ontario Act. The new \$7.4 million, state-of-the-art Thunder Bay provincial communications centre just opened this past September, and we're also investing \$6 million for a new forensic ID unit for the OPP in Thunder Bay.

We can also look forward in 2009 to the provincial announcement about the construction of a new courthouse in Thunder Bay to serve our city and district, consolidating court services, something our city has been searching for for the last 10 to 20 years. These are just a few very small examples I can raise from my chair over here this afternoon for Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

REDEEMER UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: It is my pleasure to congratulate Redeemer University College on the excellent student ratings it achieved in a recent survey.

Redeemer is a Christian undergraduate university located in Hamilton, Ontario, which serves over 860 students, 90% of whom call Ontario home. For the second consecutive year, Redeemer has earned an A in overall student satisfaction in the Globe and Mail's University Report Card.

This survey of 43,400 university students graded 55 Canadian universities on a number of key criteria. The full survey can be accessed at globecampus.ca, and clearly shows that Redeemer's overall results are among the best in the country, which is a real credit to the faculty, students, administration and supporters of this undergraduate university.

Excellent post-secondary education is one of the key elements of Ontario's research and innovation strategy in the new knowledge economy. The results of this survey show that Hamilton and Ontario can be proud of what Redeemer is contributing to this important initiative.

Mr. John O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: I seek unanimous consent to stand down our two members' statements. The members are occupied, as their private members' legislation is receiving royal assent, courtesy of the McGuinty government, and it would be a respectful pleasure at this time of year.

We have one here right now. They'll be here.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The honourable member has arrived, so I don't think we're going to have to deal with consent.

GROVES MEMORIAL COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

Mr. Ted Arnott: I wish to inform the House that Groves Memorial Community Hospital, in the township of Centre Wellington, is continuing to prepare to meet the health care needs of our residents in the 21st century.

At the end of this month, in partnership with the county of Wellington, Groves will purchase 34 acres of land in Aboyne, between Elora and Fergus, for its planned brand new hospital.

I want to express my thanks to the members of the board and the foundation, the volunteer association, all the hospital staff, as well as the county of Wellington and the township of Centre Wellington for their hard work and support on this important project.

We are ready to proceed with this new hospital. The community wants to see progress and wants to see this project proceed. But I ask once again, when will the Minister of Health be ready to proceed?

As members know, I have raised the need for a new hospital many times in this House. As the Minister of Health knows, I have written countless letters about this issue, most recently in the fall. I say again that we need to be on the ministry's five-year plan for new hospital construction. We urge the Minister of Health to do what needs to be done to make this happen.

I hope he will not allow the Waterloo Wellington LHIN to become a scapegoat for delays in the approval process for this much-needed hospital. The minister should not put the LHIN in that position. The minister must acknowledge the need and the hard work of our community. We are ready to go, but we need the minister to say yes.

CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: It is with great sadness that I rise today to pay tribute to a family that gave so much to the people of Oxford.

Richard and Laurie Hawkins and their children, Cassandra and Jordan, were much-loved members of our community. Through her outreach work as an OPP constable, Laurie Hawkins touched the lives of people throughout Oxford. Richard was an accomplished hockey player, who shared his love of hockey with the next generation through coaching. Both Cassandra and Jordan were active in sports and in their schools.

Tragically, the family's bright future was cut short by carbon monoxide poisoning. This is a devastating loss to their family, friends and our entire community. Our thoughts and prayers are with everyone who knew them.

It is sad that it took this tragedy to remind Ontarians about the necessity of having a functioning carbon monoxide detector in every home. Carbon monoxide is colourless, odourless and impossible to detect without these alarms. The US Consumer Product Safety Commission has stated that carbon monoxide is the largest cause of accidental poisoning in American homes.

We are most vulnerable during the winter, when we are heating our homes. This is the time to check and make sure that you have a carbon monoxide detector on every level of your home and that they are working. Check the batteries; make sure they're plugged in. If they're more than 10 years old, replace them. This simple device saves lives and can avoid tragedies. Please make

sure that you, your family and your friends all have functioning carbon monoxide detectors in your home.

SPECIAL REPORT, ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSIONER OF ONTARIO

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a special report of the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario entitled *Progress in a Climate of Change*, a review of Ontario's climate change action plan.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

REGULATED HEALTH PROFESSIONS AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES PROFESSIONS DE LA SANTÉ RÉGLEMENTÉES

Mr. Caplan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 141, An Act to amend the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / *Projet de loi 141, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The minister for a short statement.

Hon. David Caplan: I will make a statement during ministerial statements.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

PATIENT SAFETY

Hon. David Caplan: I rise in the House today to speak to a piece of legislation that, if passed, would strengthen patient safety and the quality of care provided by all regulated health professions and all regulated health professionals in the province.

We're proposing to amend the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, or, as it is called, the RHPA. This amendment would provide all health regulatory colleges with the tools that they need to support their mandate—specifically, the protection of the public. It would give colleges the power to conduct comprehensive inspections where health care services are provided. This is a priority for me.

Recent incidents of substandard cosmetic surgery provided by physicians have brought to light the need for change. In November 2007, the College of Physicians and Surgeons established a multi-pronged plan for responding to these incidents. This included regulating the

practice of high-risk procedures such as cosmetic surgery. I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and to thank our partner, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, for its leadership on this important matter.

Enhancing inspection powers is also becoming more important for other health professionals, especially as they expand their scopes of practice and deliver more health care services outside of regulated settings such as hospitals and independent health facilities. Regulatory colleges already have the authority to inspect premises. That includes equipment, accounts and reports. However, the current provisions of the Regulated Health Professions Act do not provide the colleges with the authority to directly observe a regulated health professional performing a procedure during an inspection. This limits the ability of the colleges to adequately inspect places where potentially unsafe health care services could be provided.

In some cases, the safety of a facility and its equipment can only be determined by directly observing the regulated health professionals who work there or observing the equipment in the facility when it is being used by the regulated health professional. That's why giving power to the colleges to directly observe a health care provider delivering health services is so important.

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The McGuinty government is committed to enhancing patient safety and quality of care provided by health care professionals. In July 2008, an amended regulation of the Public Hospitals Act was enacted to require hospitals to disclose to patients and their families any critical event that resulted in serious injury or death. In September 2008, we began full public reporting on the first of eight patient safety indicators, beginning with *Clostridium difficile*, otherwise known as *C. difficile*, as part of a comprehensive plan to create an unprecedented level of transparency in Ontario's hospitals. This is but the latest in a series of initiatives designed to reduce adverse events and protect Ontario patients.

Speaker, I hope all members of this House will support the legislation that has been introduced, and I thank you very much for affording me this opportunity today.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Hon. John Gerretsen: I'm pleased to rise today to present our government's first annual report on Ontario's climate change action plan. Faced with the reality of worldwide climate change, governments today have a clear choice: They can do nothing or embrace the transition to a low-carbon, green future. Ontario has chosen to be a leader.

Our climate change action plan, which we introduced last year, is wide-ranging and includes ambitious reduction targets for greenhouse gas emissions 6% below 1990 levels by 2014 and 15% below 1990 levels by 2020. It includes programs designed to promote alternative energy and energy conservation, create more sustainable

communities, increase Ontario's commitment to environmental research and development, and provide the foundation for a greener economy.

Achieving our greenhouse gas reduction targets is a priority. The annual report shows how we are delivering on our objectives in the transportation sector, in innovation and job creation, in creating green energy options, in building greener communities and in reducing the government's own carbon footprint.

As the first-ever annual report on our climate change action plan, the report focuses on the starting points and documents our actions over the last year. It shows Ontario is on track to meet its aggressive greenhouse gas reduction targets and adapt to climate change impacts. The report shows that Ontario has reduced its CO₂ emissions from carbon-fired electricity by 20%, and more than 2,600 megawatts of new renewable power supply has been contracted. We are protecting more than 225,000 square kilometres of the far north boreal forest region, a globally significant carbon sink.

In this report, Ontarians can learn about our efforts in implementing Move Ontario 2020, the largest commitment to public transportation in Ontario's history, and how we have streamlined the environmental approval process for public transit projects to get them up and running sooner. The annual report also shows our actions in developing programs and partnerships with other provinces, the federal government and jurisdictions in the United States.

A low-carbon economy and a culture of conservation are essential to creating sustainable future growth and prosperity for our province and for our children. In light of the difficult economic times we face in Ontario today, it is only right to remind ourselves that creating a low-carbon economy is a tremendous environmental opportunity as well as an economic advantage.

Our plan is an economy-wide plan. It is also a government-wide plan, with every ministry making a contribution. In February of this year, we set up the climate change secretariat to help coordinate our efforts across government and ensure policies and programs that will produce real results. My ministry, the Ministry of the Environment, along with other government ministries, is working closely with the secretariat, and that is reflected within the pages of this annual report.

When Premier McGuinty introduced Ontario's climate change action plan last year, he made it clear that our activities and our progress would be transparent and accountable. The progress cited in this annual report has been verified by Deloitte and Touche, and will be reviewed by the Environmental Commissioner. As a matter of fact, the Environmental Commissioner filed a report today as well, and amongst other things he states, "I am pleased with the efforts the government is making in charting a transparent course to ensure Ontario will reduce its greenhouse gas emissions." That is as stated by Gord Miller, the Environmental Commissioner.

The progress cited in this report has been verified, as I mentioned before. We are proud of our progress, but we

still have a long way to go. All of us have a role to play to meet our 2014 emission reduction targets. Ontario residents have a right to know how our plan is working. They also want to know how they can help and what is being asked of them as citizens and as business owners. We face this challenge together as Ontarians. Only by working together will we achieve our shared goal, that of a more prosperous and brighter future for generations to come.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm responding on behalf of the member from Haldimand-Norfolk, who has given me the liberty of reading Gord Miller's report here. I had a look at it, and in responding to the minister, it's a matter of perceived progress; that is really my interpretation. Or is this just another Liberal patting themselves on the back?

I would like to take a few minutes and touch on some of the salient points that the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, Gord Miller, has brought forward in his independent review released today.

It is interesting to note that while the ministry's climate change action plan has been billed as a "progress report" on government emission reductions initiatives, there's very little in the way of actual numbers with which to track the claimed progress or lack thereof. I would think if the government really wanted to highlight the results of an action plan, they would provide actual numbers to back them up. Or is this just part and parcel of the usual McGuinty "show and sham" politics that we've become so accustomed to in the last four or five years?

More to that point, the Environmental Commissioner mentions in his review that there is a very real concern that while emissions may go down in the province, these reductions have no connection to any government initiative whatsoever. I'm adding my own impression, which is that it's more a result of the collapse of the Ontario economy and some 250,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector that may be an explanation. In fact, any credit for emission reductions today may be better attributed to the government's inaction, which has resulted in the economic tailspin that we now find ourselves reeling in.

In fact, if I go on here, the commissioner points to a very real concern that this government may simply take credit for carbon reduction resulting from a shrinking economy and the shutting down of industries, rather than taking the steps called for to meet the plan's real goals. Mr. Miller points out, "It will be important for the government to clarify the extent to which these reductions are permanent or only transitory."

There's more to say on this topic on this side of the House. We support any plan or any action that will result in a better quality of life, not just in emissions but in our economy generally.

PATIENT SAFETY

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm very pleased to rise on behalf of the PC Party to respond to this new regulation entitled the Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act, 2008.

We all remember that about a year ago, in September 2007, Krista Stryland, a Toronto real estate agent and 32-year-old mother, walked into her doctor's office to undergo a routine liposuction treatment. Tragically, she never came out. She died of cardiac arrest. Of course, this case was one of several high-profile deaths which have put the spotlight on cosmetic surgery and the need for action. We've certainly had other examples as well.

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While some Canadian provinces, such as Alberta and British Columbia, strictly regulate those who perform cosmetic surgery, Ontario has been slower to do so. In both of the western provinces, all surgeons and surgical facilities must be licensed for each procedure they perform; as well, doctors cannot advertise themselves as cosmetic surgeons without holding a surgical specialty.

Our own College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario proposed regulatory changes in 2008 that would prevent doctors from calling themselves "cosmetic surgeons," a term applied to doctors who are not plastic surgeons and who perform procedures including facelifts, tummy tucks and liposuction. I would like to point out that this term is not formally recognized by licensing bodies. So, the CPSO has been trying to do what they can. They have taken some initiatives and they've attempted to pass a policy, obviously, which requires doctors to report changes in their scope of practice etc.

Today, in an attempt to protect patient safety, which obviously must be of paramount importance, we have the ministry stepping up to the forefront and proposing that we would allow for inspections of facilities. Not only would the CPSO have this power, but all regulatory bodies would. This is important.

I look forward to hearing the colleges' response. I don't know how much consultation there has been with the colleges regarding this legislation, but obviously the government needs to listen to the colleges.

Certainly, this is a step in the right direction—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Responses?

PATIENT SAFETY

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm happy to rise today to speak on the amendment to the Regulated Health Professions Act.

It is imperative that Ontarians have confidence in our health care system, and patient safety must always be a key concern among all health professionals. But in 2007, this confidence was shaken, most notably after the death of a young woman as a result of a physician providing substandard cosmetic surgery in an out-of-hospital facility. That's why the government is introducing this legislation today.

Following this tragic accident, the College of Physicians and Surgeons recognized the need to better monitor cosmetic surgery in Ontario. In particular, the college discovered gaps in the Regulated Health Professions Act that limit the college's ability to directly observe their members in practise.

The college has also submitted to the ministry other changes to better protect Ontarians that will come forward as regulatory, not legislative, changes. For example, the college has now changed its policy of voluntary self-reporting, which resulted in some physicians, but not all, reporting and undergoing the training, supervision and assessment required by the policies. In October 2007, the college made it mandatory for all of its members to submit a detailed account about the cosmetic procedures they are providing to their patients. As well, a regulation will soon be forthcoming to limit the use of specialist titles such as "cosmetic surgeon." The college recognizes that the medical community had not kept pace with the expanding field of cosmetic surgery and that patient safety in Ontario was being compromised. Recognizing that you have a problem is the first step in solving it, and I commend the college for taking these actions.

I must note that the college submitted a number of regulations and bylaw amendments to the ministry in March 2008, and it has taken nine months for the government to come back with this small amendment.

I urge the ministry to continue working with all health regulatory colleges to make sure that proper safety standards are in place for all high-risk procedures. The work done by the College of Physicians and Surgeons is a step in the right direction. I look forward to seeing the ministry act swiftly to strengthen patient safety so that all Ontarians have confidence in our health care system.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I rise to talk about the Ontario climate change action plan annual report. As you would know, the NDP has long recognized the urgency of the threat of climate change, and we were the first party to raise this issue in the House of Commons.

Canadians produce more greenhouse gas emissions per capita than any other population. The government of Ontario is committed to reduce GHGs, greenhouse gases, by 15% below 1990 levels by 2020. To meet this target, this government is going to have to be far more aggressive than it has shown to date. In particular, when we talk about suburban sprawl, the plans that have been put forward and approved by this government are not adequate to contain sprawl. We know that 60% of new development is going to take place on greenfields, meaning that far more cars will be driving far longer distances for people to get to and from work. The Metrolinx plan will in fact not stop sprawl, will not slow down the car culture. Absolute levels of greenhouse gas emissions, under Metrolinx, will increase over the next 25 years, given the plan that has been put forward.

I want to note as well that this government is stubbornly and profoundly committed to nuclear energy. It is

pursuing maximum targets for nuclear energy and pursuing minimum targets for renewable energy. It's not taking advantage of all the energy efficiency and conservation measures that are available, and it's capping the long-term development of solar, wind and biomass far short of the levels that are deployed in other jurisdictions.

There's no question that this is a government that's committed to conventional power at the heart of its energy and climate planning and that, because of its commitment to nuclear, by 2020 the replacements that are necessary for coal will not be there. We will be either burning a lot of gas, continuing to burn coal in coal-fired power plants, or buying electricity from other jurisdictions that are burning coal.

The environmental organization Greenpeace has shown that the government will miss its greenhouse gas emission targets by one third because of its commitment to nuclear.

The report from the government on its action plan is not encouraging; in fact, it's completely discouraging.

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

Hon. James J. Bradley: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent for a statement on human rights—five minutes to each party.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): If you're going to say that it's seven minutes, that was my understanding.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Really, we don't need the unanimous consent at this point.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Unanimous consent for seven minutes? Agreed.

Attorney General.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: It's a privilege for me to rise today to mark International Human Rights Day. Sixty years ago, on December 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to further fight discrimination and oppression.

La déclaration représentait la première reconnaissance formelle internationale que les droits de la personne et les libertés fondamentales s'appliquent à tout le monde, partout et toujours.

The declaration represented the first formal international formal recognition that human rights and fundamental freedoms apply to everyone everywhere and always.

Ontario's own human rights system benefited from the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but it is based on the experience of ordinary Ontarians like the late Hugh Burnett, who worked tirelessly for civil rights in the late 1940s and 1950s in response to his first-hand experiences of racial discrimination. I met recently with his daughter to hear his story and look

forward to working with others to find a fitting way to recognize his unique contribution to human rights in the province of Ontario.

As a province, we've always taken a leadership position within Canada when it comes to protecting human rights. Sadly, one of those leaders, former chair of the Human Rights Commission Dorothea Crittenden, passed away earlier this week at the age of 93. Dorothea and all others who've worked for the cause of human rights have our gratitude.

It's fitting that the theme for the 60th anniversary of the declaration is Dignity and Justice for All of Us. This past June, we celebrated the launch of a stronger new human rights system for Ontario. Through our new human rights system, this government is committed to ensuring dignity and justice for all who face discrimination.

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The new system respects the dignity of those with discrimination claims by giving them the ability to bring forward complaints themselves through direct and effective access to the tribunal. The new Human Rights Legal Support Centre is now representing those who would otherwise have difficulty accessing justice, and the Ontario Human Rights Commission will now be better able to proactively address systemic societal human rights issues. In this last year, almost half of the 4,000 outstanding human rights cases that accumulated over the years were closed.

Michael Gottheil, Barbara Hall and Raj Anand deserve recognition for their inspirational leadership over the past months and years in building and promoting Ontario's new human rights system. Together, they have made Ontario an example for the rest of the world.

La justice est une fiducie que notre gouvernement détient pour la population de l'Ontario. Elle doit fonctionner pour tous les habitants de la province et être accessible à tous les Ontariens et Ontariennes.

Justice is a trust our government holds for the people of Ontario. It must work for everyone in the province and be accessible to all Ontarians.

We are determined to ensure that Ontarians have access to justice, and that's why we're relentless in our efforts to reform our system of justice—whether it's criminal, civil or family law—so that Ontarians can find justice when they need to find it and when they need it most. We're committed to making it simpler, faster and more affordable for Ontarians to resolve their disputes.

These reforms, the changes we recently made to our human rights system and our government's commitment to reducing child poverty speak directly to the theme of this year's 60th anniversary: Dignity and Justice for All of Us.

Governments have a clear responsibility to protect human rights—to ensure dignity and justice for those who face discrimination, for families and for everyone. We all have an individual responsibility to uphold human rights in our communities, to respect one another's rights and to speak out against discrimination and harassment.

Today we pay tribute to those who originally drafted the declaration 60 years ago, and those who have worked so hard in the province of Ontario, both before that and since, to make that vision a reality.

Mr. Peter Shurman: December 10 indeed marks the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and I am honoured to rise today, on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, to celebrate this important day in history.

On the United Nations website, one can read the following: "...human rights are inherent to all and the concern of the whole of the international community.... The declaration and its core values, including non-discrimination, equality, fairness and universality, apply to everyone, everywhere and always." Lovely words, and definitely words with which no civilized person could disagree. Where it gets contentious is when we begin to think about where and often whether these words carry real meaning.

When this declaration was created, the world was still in turmoil as a result of the Second World War. The declaration reflected, and still does reflect, humanity's aspirations for a future of prosperity, dignity and peaceful coexistence. These are still our objectives, but that world and today's world are two very different places.

It was a Canadian from New Brunswick, John Peters Humphrey, who, as the first director of the human rights division of the United Nations Secretariat, became the principal drafter of the universal declaration.

Canada has its own human rights declaration and, as a country, we should all feel very proud of our record. No, we are not perfect, but there are many, many examples of human rights abuses in our world that we can plainly observe before we engage in any self-criticism. Nonetheless, persevere we must.

As we celebrate our own record, we need to think about those who are not so lucky. The Secretary General of the United Nations has said, "The challenges we face today are as daunting as those that confronted the declaration's drafters."

Today we face a global financial crisis, which we in Ontario are all feeling, and more expert people than I suggest it will get worse before it gets better. That said, we know there are food shortages in many parts of the world that are impacting the lives of men, women and children. Eating should not be in any question when we discuss universal human rights.

Political repression is all too present in many countries. We, as Canadians, have a record of fighting hard to end this. Our federal government speaks to these concerns at every opportunity, and we in Ontario support that.

The most vulnerable in the world are hurt the most by abuse, starvation and lack of comforts that we all take for granted. We are lucky to live in a country where we have the freedom to express ourselves through words, religion and in literally any other way we wish. I am not Pollyannaish on being Canadian, just very proud.

We are among the luckiest in the world. For the most part, we are spared the hardships that others have to face. That does not mean there aren't starving Canadians and it doesn't mean that every one of us is well treated, but we can always strive to do better, and strive we shall. We cannot ignore what is happening around us and we cannot sit back and say, "Let someone else do it." Sitting back and doing nothing is not part of our national make-up. Since 1992, Canada has participated in UN missions in Rwanda, the Balkans, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Haiti, Prevlaka, Mozambique, Guatemala, East Timor, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Côte d'Ivoire, or Ivory Coast, and Sudan. And now we support the fight for human rights with over 3,000 of our finest men and women stationed in Afghanistan.

Canada is a country that believes in human rights, and we will continue to fight for those who cannot fight for themselves, even as we improve the lot of our own less fortunate. Let us remember today, on this international day for human rights, what the original intent of the United Nations declaration was. I repeat as I began: "Human rights are inherent to all and the concern of the whole of the international community."

Mr. Peter Kormos: On behalf of Howard Hampton and New Democrats here at Queen's Park, I'm proud and pleased to join in this recognition of International Human Rights Day, indeed on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the adoption and proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Here in Canada and Ontario, we tend to become very self-righteous as we point out, expose and condemn human rights abuses and violations throughout the world, yet fail to recognize human rights abuses and violations here in our own home, here in the province of Ontario. It's our responsibility and obligation to speak out, fight and struggle against human rights abuses internationally, but somehow it seems that the obligation to address human rights abuses falls even more heavily on us when we're talking about our own province and our own country.

Of course, human rights violations in this province, some would say, are hidden better, less exposed. It's not that there aren't human rights abuses and violations and it's not that they don't affect a lot of people, but it's that the people who are disproportionately affected are some of the most vulnerable and marginalized in our society: new Canadians, low-income Canadians, poor Canadians, women, those from racialized communities, disabled persons and members of First Nations communities.

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states very, very clearly:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

This means that even in an economic downturn, there's no excuse for being in violation of any of these

standards or the numerous others listed as rights in the declaration: education, unionization and access to justice.

We remain incredibly concerned about this government's dismantling of the Ontario Human Rights Commission and its privatization of human rights advocacy so as to limit access to the system by those who need it most—some of the most vulnerable and some of the poorest in our province. The most gross violation of human rights in depth and breadth surely is among the first people of this country in aboriginal and First Nations communities. Whether it's contaminated water, inadequate access to housing or health care, shameful child mortality rates, lack of access to employment or outright violation of land claims, this province has not met its responsibility to First Nations people, and especially the young in those First Nations communities.

1550

The school in Attawapiskat is still not a reality. That community and those children have gone to great lengths to create a broad-based campaign to try to get some swift action on what is their fundamental human right being denied them, here in this province of Ontario.

The human rights declaration affirms the right to an adequate standard of living through provisions such as a fair minimum wage, adequate social assistance, access to affordable housing, child benefits and child care, pay equity, unionization, amongst so many other things. Ontario is the child poverty leader in this country, with one in nine kids growing up in poverty. That amounts to 44% of all children in poverty in Canada, the highest percentage ever.

Parents and children are entitled to child care and assistance in this province. We see a persistent cut to child benefits under the auspices of redistribution and prolonged rollouts. The fact is that previous dollars that helped parents in preparation for the new school year or for winter have now been cut drastically.

The average low-income family is living over \$7,000 a year below the poverty line. Forty-five per cent of low-income children live in families where at least one parent is working full time all year. No one who is working should be living in poverty. No one who is denied the ability to work should be living in poverty either, yet that's the case in Ontario today. New Democrats have stated clearly that we need to see a \$10.25 per hour minimum wage now so that working Ontarians, low-income Ontarians, can at least begin living at the poverty line.

The shortage of affordable housing deepens the hardships experienced by low-income families, with waiting lists for users numbering more than 125,000—those lists as long as 21 years, like in Peel region. That is a violation of the fundamental right to decent housing and shelter.

The right to form a union, the right to collectively bargain, is a right still denied agricultural workers in this province, workers working for some of the lowest wages, in some of the most dangerous workplaces and under some of the most abusive conditions. This government persists in denying those agricultural workers the right to

belong to a union and collectively bargain, notwithstanding that the Ontario Court of Appeal in a unanimous decision has made it very clear that that's a violation of the Canadian Constitution—and I say to you it's a violation as well of the Ontario human rights declaration.

As well, the right to join a union has to be accompanied by the right to form that union, and when this government continues to deny the vast majority of workers, the poorest workers in this province, card-based certification, it continues to deny them a fundamental human right.

We must challenge the status quo in this province if we are truly committed to celebrating this day.

PETITIONS

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mrs. Julia Munro: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the 48 Sluse Road, Holland Landing, East Gwillimbury Sluse Road location is on the short list for the province's proposed northern York region peaking plant; and

“Whereas this proposed site is only 500 metres from Park Avenue Public School; and

“Whereas this proposed plant represents significant health and safety risks to the children and staff at Park Avenue Public School;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government to reject the proposed Sluse Road Holland Landing peaking plant project.”

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Kim Craitor: I am pleased to read this petition on behalf of my colleague the member for Mississauga—Streetsville, Mr. Bob Delaney.

“Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

“Western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre:

“Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

“Whereas ‘day surgery’ procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin plan-

ning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I'm pleased to sign my signature in support of this petition.

DIABETES TREATMENT

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition provided to me by Mike Howes, which reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas elementary school-aged children in the province of Ontario suffering from diabetes require regular blood sugar monitoring and may also require insulin and glucagon to manage their disease; and

"Whereas there is no medical or nursing assistance readily available in schools as there was in the past; and

"Whereas the parents/guardians of these children must currently visit their child's school several times throughout the day in order to test their child's blood sugar levels; and

"Whereas the absence of medical support in our elementary schools results in substantial stress and disruption to the lives of children and their working parents;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) That elementary schools in the province of Ontario have on-site staff trained in the daily monitoring of blood sugar levels of children who suffer from diabetes; and

"(2) That the trained staff also administer insulin and glucagon when required, with the consent of the child's parent/guardian."

As I agree with the petition, I affix my name thereto.

INTERPROVINCIAL BRIDGE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas:

"(1) ROCHE-NCE, a consulting firm hired to study potential sites for an interprovincial crossing between Ottawa and Gatineau, is recommending that an interprovincial bridge across the Ottawa River be built at Kettle Island, connecting to the scenic Aviation Parkway in Ottawa, turning it into a four-lane commuter and truck route passing through downtown residential communities;

"(2) Along the proposed route are homes, seniors' apartments, schools, parks, the Montfort Long Term Care Facility and the Montfort Hospital, all of which would be severely impacted by noise, vibration and disease-causing air pollution;

"(3) A truck and commuter route through neighbourhoods is a safety issue because of the increased risk to pedestrians and cyclists and the transport of hazardous materials; and

"(4) There are other, more suitable corridors further east, outside of the downtown core, which would have minimal impact on Ottawa residents;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To reject the recommendation of a bridge at Kettle Island and to select a more suitable corridor to proceed to phase two of the interprovincial crossings environmental assessment study."

I affix my signature to this petition and send it to the table via page Swapnil.

DIABETES TREATMENT

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I have a petition given to me by Don Corry.

"Whereas elementary school-aged children in the province of Ontario suffering from diabetes require regular blood sugar monitoring and may also require insulin and glucagon to manage their disease; and

"Whereas there is no medical or nursing assistance readily available in schools as there was in the past; and

"Whereas the parents/guardians of these children must currently visit their child's school several times throughout the day in order to test their child's blood sugar levels; and

"Whereas the absence of medical support in our elementary schools results in substantial stress and disruption to the lives of both the children and their working parents;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) That elementary schools in the province of Ontario have on-site staff trained in the daily monitoring of blood sugar levels of children who suffer from diabetes; and

"(2) That the trained staff also administer insulin and glucagon when required, with the consent of the child's parent/guardian."

I agree with the petition and I will give it to page Tess.

1600

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Mario Sergio: I have another petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the federal government's employment insurance surplus now stands at \$54 billion; and

"Whereas over 75% of Ontario's unemployed are not eligible for employment insurance because of Ottawa's unfair eligibility rules; and

"Whereas an Ontario worker has to work more weeks to qualify and receives fewer weeks of benefits than other Canadian unemployed workers; and

"Whereas the average Ontario unemployed worker gets \$4,000 less in EI benefits than unemployed workers in other provinces and thus ... are not qualifying for many retraining programs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to press the federal government to reform the employment insurance program and to end this discrimination and unfairness towards Ontario's unemployed workers."

I do concur with the petitioners and I will affix my name to it.

DIABETES TREATMENT

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition. The first signature on here is by Deborah Hartt from Cambridge. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas elementary school-aged children in the province of Ontario suffering from diabetes require regular blood sugar monitoring and may also require insulin and glucagon to manage their disease; and

"Whereas there is no medical or nursing assistance readily available in schools as there was in the past; and

"Whereas the parents/guardians of these children must currently visit their child's school several times throughout the day in order to test their child's blood sugar levels; and

"Whereas the absence of medical support in our elementary schools results in substantial stress and disruption to the lives of children and their working parents;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) That elementary schools in the province of Ontario have on-site staff trained in the daily monitoring of blood sugar levels of children who suffer from diabetes; and

"(2) That the trained staff also administer insulin and glucagon when required, with the consent of the child's parent/guardian."

I'm pleased to sign this, present it to Sahara and endorse the petition.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents.

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect

to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act as above to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks' table.

DIABETES TREATMENT

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition signed and provided to me by Linda Lantz.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas elementary school-aged children in the province of Ontario suffering from diabetes require regular blood sugar monitoring and may also require insulin and glucagon to manage their disease; and

"Whereas there is no medical or nursing assistance readily available in schools as there was in the past; and

"Whereas the parents/guardians of these children must currently visit their child's school several times throughout the day in order to test their child's blood sugar levels; and

"Whereas the absence of medical support in our elementary schools results in substantial stress and disruption to the lives of children and their working parents;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) That elementary schools in the province of Ontario have on-site staff trained in the daily monitoring of blood sugar levels of children who suffer from diabetes; and

"(2) That the trained staff also administer insulin and glucagon when required, with the consent of the child's parent/guardian."

As I agree with this petition, I endorse it.

BATHURST HEIGHTS ADULT LEARNING CENTRE

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition from new Canadian students at the Bathurst Heights ESL learning centre.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there are over 2,000 adult ESL students being served by the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre, operated by the Toronto District School Board, in partnership with the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas this is the only English as a second language (ESL) learning centre in this area of the city located directly on the Spadina subway line, making it accessible for students across the city; and

"Whereas newcomers in Toronto, and in the Lawrence Heights area, need the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre so they can" get a job and "succeed in their career ... ; and

"Whereas the proposed revitalization of Lawrence Heights threatens the existence of the centre;

"Therefore we, the undersigned," request "that any revitalization of Lawrence Heights include a newcomer centre and ensure that the Bathurst Heights centre continues to exist in the present location."

I support this petition and I affix my name to it.

OSTOMY SUPPLIES

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition to the Parliament of Ontario which reads as follows:

"Whereas there are thousands of ostomy patients across Ontario, many of whom are on fixed incomes;

"Whereas the assistive devices program currently funds \$600 annually for ostomy supplies, which in some cases is merely a third of the annual cost;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, request the McGuinty government increase funding to those who must purchase ostomy supplies in order to survive."

I am pleased to present this to Zac on his third-last day as I sign and endorse this petition.

LUPUS

Mr. Kim Craiton: I'm pleased to introduce this petition into Parliament today. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no new safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

I'm pleased to sign my signature in support of this petition.

GYPSY MOTHS

Mr. John O'Toole: It seems it's an endless job petitioning on behalf of the people of Ontario. This petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas gypsy moths pose a dangerous threat to our forests in Norfolk county and across the province of Ontario"—certainly not at this time of year, but we're preparing for the spring, since there's no action plan on the other side.

"Whereas many properties in Norfolk and Haldimand counties have been deforested and dramatically harmed by gypsy moths" this past summer; "and

"Whereas the province of Ontario has previously funded a cost-shared gypsy moth spraying program;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources immediately fund"—in the spring—"a gypsy moth spraying program to assist landowners and municipalities attempting to control further gypsy moth infestation" in the province of Ontario.

I'm pleased to sign this in support of it and present it to Zac on his third-last day.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The time for petitions has expired.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I beg to inform the House that, in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to certain bills in his office.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The following are the titles of the bills to which His Honour did assent:

Bill 37, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act to protect Ontario's children / *Projet de loi 37, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille afin de protéger les enfants de l'Ontario.*

Bill 98, An Act to promote the sale of Ontario produced agricultural products by amending the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act / *Projet de loi 98, Loi visant à promouvoir la vente de produits agricoles ontariens en modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement des voies publiques et des transports en commun.*

1610

Bill 99, An Act to protect and restore the ecological health of the Lake Simcoe watershed and to amend the Ontario Water Resources Act in respect of water quality trading / *Projet de loi 99, Loi visant à protéger et à rétablir la santé écologique du bassin hydrographique du lac Simcoe et à modifier la Loi sur les ressources en eau de l'Ontario en ce qui concerne un système d'échange axé sur la qualité de l'eau.*

Bill 100, An Act to amend the Corporations Tax Act and the Taxation Act, 2007 / *Projet de loi 100, Loi modi-*

fiant la Loi sur l'imposition des sociétés et la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts.

Bill 111, An Act to proclaim Emancipation Day / Projet de loi 111, Loi proclamant le Jour de l'émancipation.

Bill 124, An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act with respect to cigarillos / Projet de loi 124, Loi modifiant la Loi favorisant un Ontario sans fumée en ce qui a trait aux cigarillos.

Bill Pr9, An Act to revive 2029652 Ontario Ltd.

Bill Pr10, An Act respecting Master's College and Seminary.

Bill Pr11, An Act to revive Eugerry Investments Limited.

Bill Pr12, An Act to revive Porcupine Goldtop Mines Limited and to change its name to Porcupine Goldor Mines Limited.

Bill Pr13, An Act to revive 2076467 Ontario Inc.

Bill Pr14, An Act to revive 1068080 Ontario Limited.

Bill Pr19, An Act to revive Able Insurance Brokers Ltd.

Bill Pr20, An Act respecting the Joseph and Wolf Lebovic Jewish Community Campus.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that the following committees be authorized to meet during the adjournment and/or, in the event of the prorogation of the first session of the 39th Parliament and notwithstanding such prorogation, during the interval between the first and second sessions of the 39th Parliament, and/or upon resumption of the first or second sessions of the 39th Parliament, as follows:

Standing Committee on Government Agencies: February 9 through 11, 2009, inclusive and the afternoon from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. on the first Monday following the resumption of the House in 2009; and

Standing Committee on Public Accounts: four days commencing no earlier than February 17, 2009, such days to be determined by unanimous decision of the subcommittee on committee business; and

Standing Committee on General Government, which is authorized to consider Bills 118 and 126 concurrently during the week of February 9, 2009, for the purpose of conducting public hearings on the bills in locations in Ontario at the discretion of the committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The deputy government House leader has moved a motion regarding certain committee meetings and meeting dates. Deputy government House leader?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I am pleased to put forward this motion on behalf of the government. It will help us to get our business done during the break. I know that one of my colleagues, at least, has something to say

on this motion today. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker. We have agreed that there won't be lengthy debate on this matter, not lengthy at all.

This is a relatively routine process at the end of each session of the House. The operative words here, though, are "in the event of ... prorogation," and I'm going to have more to say about that because there's going to be a little more discussion about the next motion that I expect the government is going to be putting forward today.

This, as the deputy House leader, for whom I have the greatest admiration, affection and respect, says, is designed to let committees sit during the break. Had there been lavish junkets, as this government so often designs into its committee hearings during breaks, I would have resisted this type of motion. But this is a relatively and remarkably frugal and delightfully frugal approach to—

Hon. Monique M. Smith: It's always delightful to go to Sudbury in January.

Mr. Peter Kormos: The deputy House leader is doing the best job she can to erode my affection for her, but I can resist. There's nothing she can do or say that's not going to make me like her as much as I do. So we support this, as I say.

The operative word is "prorogation," and the next motion lends itself to a far more thorough discussion of prorogation and exactly what this government has in mind or, more frankly, doesn't have in mind for over a quarter of a million Ontario workers who have lost their jobs in the last three years, those unemployed workers, those families, and the tens of thousands more who will be losing their jobs during what could well be a very protracted vacation for Mr. McGuinty and his backbenchers.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

There being none, Ms. Smith has moved government motion A, a motion to authorize certain committees to meet during the winter adjournment.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Orders of the day.

STATUS OF BUSINESS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that, notwithstanding prorogation, the following business remaining on the Orders and Notices paper be continued and placed on the Orders and Notices paper of the second sessional day of the second session of the 39th Parliament at the same stage of business for the House and its committees as at prorogation:

(i) all government bills, except Bill 1, An Act to Perpetuate an Ancient Parliamentary Right and Bill 24, An Act to amend the Assessment Act, Community Small

Business Investment Funds Act, Corporations Tax Act, Education Act, Income Tax Act, Land Transfer Tax Act and Taxation Act, 2007; and

(ii) the following private members' public bills:

Bill 18, An Act respecting the disclosure of information about marijuana grow operations;

Bill 87, An Act to regulate the motor vehicle towing industry in Ontario;

Bill 91, An Act to amend the Public Vehicles Act respecting bicycle racks on public vehicles;

Bill 101, An Act respecting energy rating for specified residential buildings;

Bill 106, An Act to provide for safer communities and neighbourhoods;

Bill 109, An Act to provide a tax credit for the purchase of equipment or devices for persons with disabilities;

Bill 131, An Act to amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 with respect to retailers of electricity and gas marketers;

Bill 132, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act; and

(iii) all private bills; and

(iv) the ballot list for private members' public business;

and that a new ballot for private members' public business be conducted prior to the commencement of the new session and appended to the existing ballot list; pursuant to standing order 98(c) any member may exchange places in the order of precedence with any other member on either ballot list.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Ms. Smith has moved government motion B.

Further debate?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I won't be speaking long to this, as I know one of my colleagues in particular has a lot to say, but I am pleased that our government is putting forward this motion today to allow us some flexibility as we move into the break time. We are looking forward to continuing to work with the members on the other side of the House in the new year, and I wanted to take this opportunity, as I may not be speaking tomorrow, to wish all of the members of the House a very happy holiday, a very safe and happy time with their families, and I look forward to hearing what the other members of the House have to say on this motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I would also like to take this opportunity, as I may not be here tomorrow, to wish all persons, staff and members, a Merry Christmas, happy holiday, and a safe time during this intersession.

But on the specifics of the motion, I'd like to mention a few things that I'm a small bit disappointed in. This may be self-serving, but that won't be first time that's occurred here.

I would say that I'm quite happy that the Minister of Transportation has brought forward the two bills to the general government committee, Bills 118 and 126, with

hearings the week of February 9. I certainly look forward to participating in that.

I want to mention a couple of bills that I thought could have been moved in the private members' section. I caution the government, because I'll have to introduce these again; there will be another amount of time used to get to first reading.

Bill 19, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act to provide for a tax credit for expenses incurred in using public transit: The federal government has adopted it. I'm giving it to the Minister of Transportation, or of public infrastructure, whoever, to do the right thing. This would help Metrolinx. This is the right thing to do, and I think the hearings on that would have been a very important contribution.

The second one is Bill 36, which is an act that has been troubling. There were some comments today with respect to the agricultural community and the challenges there on food quality, food safety and the auditor's report. Bill 36 is An Act to regulate the spreading and storage of sewage sludge and biosolids on agricultural land. I think this bill's time has come. There are a number of agricultural leaders here who would agree with that.

1620

Bill 40, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of cellphones and other technologies: I think Mr. Bradley has seen the light on that. It has now been kind of folded into Bill 118. I will probably be moving an amendment to rename it the O'Toole bill, but that might be a bit too productive as well. It may not be supported, but we'll see. I'll always be hopeful.

There's one other bill that I think, to be serious, is a good bill. Currently before the House is Bill 133, which deals with family law, and I have a bill that persons have brought to my attention, Bill 10, An Act, in memory of Lori Dupont, to better protect victims of domestic violence. In a serious tone, what this bill does is provide for restraining orders to be accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to victims of domestic violence through a JP or a family court judge. I think there is some merit in that bill, and I'll probably be reintroducing it. But they could fold it into Bill 133, a current bill that has been referred to committee.

In the spirit of the season, some of what I said is meant just in the respect that I was listening and, secondly, to wish the best of the season to everyone. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I am going to be here tomorrow, so I'll not make any premature greetings to colleagues.

My dear, dear friend the deputy government House leader moves this motion as if it was some sort of normal, everyday kind of procedure that should be passed on a nod and given no attention. This motion wouldn't be necessary, and would not have been moved, were the government not contemplating prorogation of the House. What does that mean?

We have a protracted and attractive Christmas break. The House rises, based on the House calendar in the standing orders, on December 11, and the standing orders say that the House doesn't resume until the third Tuesday in February. That would be February 17, according to the calendar attached to member Lalonde's Christmas card, which he just handed me. I suspect that is a statutory holiday, which means we'll be coming back not on the 17th but on the 18th.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, do the math. We're already talking about December through January through February, two months plus of Christmas vacation. There are a whole lot of workers out there across this province who are going to have time on their hands this Christmas but they're not being paid because they've lost their jobs. Every member of this assembly will continue to receive their rather attractive paycheque.

Leaving December 11? Yesterday, the government was patting itself on the back. People were in the galleries welcoming the government's amendments to the Employment Standards Act, which restored some most modest of things to workers in temp agencies—the poorest workers, the lowest-income workers, some of the hardest-working workers in this province.

Our critic, the member for Parkdale–High Park, told the government we would be more than pleased to sit through the course of next week—my goodness, to work through to December 18 rather than go home to our vacation time on December 11—to address the interests of the poorest workers in this province. What a modest proposal.

I recall that it was two years ago, just about to the day, that Mr. McGuinty and the Liberals had no hesitation whatsoever in sitting an extra week to give themselves a 40% pay increase, and that was in a climate in the province of Ontario where jobs were evaporating, where the province was haemorrhaging good manufacturing and resource sector jobs.

So let's understand this: The standing orders provide that in the normal course of events, we'd have, give or take, a two-month-plus vacation with pay. It bothers me and disturbs me that in an economic climate where we have not just lost a quarter of a million jobs but stand to lose tens of thousands more literally in the weeks ahead, this Legislature wouldn't be sitting, talking about a plan, talking about policies that would provide relief for those workers and their families who have lost jobs, that would provide protection for the jobs that we have left, that might even try to restore some of the jobs that have been lost. But the government chose not to do that, as is its right.

Back to the motion: Let's understand that this motion is all about prorogation. This motion is about the government exercising its power—prorogation has been written about a fair amount in the last week, hasn't it, member from Peterborough? Mr. Harper has been condemned in so many circles for abandoning Parliament with a prorogation rather than addressing serious issues

affecting working folks across this country. Yet here we have Premier McGuinty, who, rather than condemn Mr. Harper, appears to be wanting to emulate him, because this motion is about the prospect of the government exercising its power to prorogue, just like Mr. Harper went to the Governor General exercising his own. Mr. McGuinty won't go to the Governor General; he'll go to our very capable Lieutenant Governor. It's clear the Lieutenant Governor has no choice but to grant a prorogation request. If anything, the Governor General's decision earlier this week indicates that the Governor General has very little authority to refuse a prorogation request. What does that mean? It means that we won't come back on February 15-16; we may not come back on March 15; we may not come back on April 15; we may not come back until May 15.

Prorogation is used for many reasons. One of the reasons that prorogation is used, as Mr. Harper so eloquently demonstrated, is to flee the responsibilities of government and the consequences of Parliament and its procedures. Good grief. Down where I come from, thousands of jobs—it is going to be a cold, cold winter and a bleak, bleak Christmas and holiday season for a whole lot of families, not just in Niagara but across this province, everything from 800 workers at John Deere to the smaller number of, but no less significant, workers at Frito Lay.

This government talks about a feeble, ineffective, feckless and, quite frankly, underutilized—and I'll tell you why in just a minute—retraining program. Down where I come from, workers have already been retrained. We've lost all of what I call our first-tier jobs: the manufacturing jobs, the unionized jobs, the good jobs, the jobs with good wages, the jobs with pensions attached to them, the jobs with benefits attached to them. Those workers have already been retrained. They retrained to work in the small jobbers' operations, in the machine shops and in the smaller shops that you see along the Queen Elizabeth Way, if you drive down there through Beamsville and on to Vineland. What that meant was, tradespeople and industrial workers making \$28 an hour are now making \$13 and \$14 an hour.

The problem is, though, that with the collapse of the auto sector and with the failure of this government to produce any plan whatsoever and the failure of Mr. McGuinty and the Liberals to produce any policies whatsoever that would have any hope of addressing the devastation in the auto sector, those tier-two jobs are disappearing, too.

We've noted, and I had an occasion just the other day when I talked about David Chev Olds and Gillespie Pontiac Buick down in Welland—car dealerships—because, when we're talking about auto, we're talking about manufacturing and assembling; we're talking about auto parts, whether it's Magna or GDX down in Welland; we're talking about the small machine shops that do contract jobs for auto plants. We're also talking about car dealerships. I made note of the fact that in small-town Welland, those two dealerships alone—I hadn't gotten

the same correspondence from the Ford and Chrysler dealerships—employed over 100 people with reasonably good jobs at reasonably good pay. So when the auto sector collapses, it's going to be those jobs too.

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The government says it's going to retrain those unemployed workers. Retrain them for what? Those workers have already been retrained down in Niagara. They were retrained to work in the casino. They were trained as blackjack dealers or slot machine technicians. But you see, the casino is laying off people too. It's reducing its workforce, one, because the revenues are dropping, and that in and of itself is of concern, or should be, to a government that is addicted to gaming revenues—but also, in the fervour to preserve revenues, jobs are being destroyed in the casinos.

There are no jobs left for these people to train for. Why, just earlier today, the Minister of Training, amongst other things, talked about 4,000 hours of training for call centre workers. I believe that same minister has earned himself a Ph.D.; he didn't spend 4,000 hours earning a Ph.D. You talk about 4,000 hours training call centre workers? And the call centre jobs are leaving this province, as well. Try it: The next time you call Sympatico, the next time your Sympatico system with your computer—and break down it will—after you've been put on hold for Lord knows how long, and you talk to a technician whom you plead with to help you get your box back up and operating, just happen to ask, "Where am I speaking to?" Again, people in south Asia need work too and have every right to work. But, you see, the call centres that were at one point considered the panacea for job losses here are now being exported to south Asia, amongst other places. People know what I'm talking about. The insurance industry that increasingly uses direct sales rather than brokers—not all of it, but a big chunk of it—uses call centres. If you call those call centres and ask where you're calling to, you'll find yourself talking to some people in some of the most exotic places in the world. It's like a National Geographic tour to try to do domestic household business on the telephone as you're routed from a call centre from one continent to another. So the call centres are at risk, as well. Four thousand hours for training a call centre worker? I don't think so.

Let's be a little more frank here: There are no more casino jobs for the workers who lost their jobs at Frito Lay to be trained for, and the casino workers are losing their jobs.

I don't know what this government has got in mind with their proposals to dress up some of those John Deere workers in tutus and send them down the road here in Toronto to the new ballet centre and have them dance in the Nutcracker Suite, but that's how nonsensical this whole proposal—"Oh, don't worry, we'll retrain you"—from this government is.

The economy is going to Hades in a handbasket. We're losing jobs hand over fist.

I was with the Premier this morning when he did his media availability. Like a deer in the headlights, the Pre-

mier said—I was there, and the press gallery heard him because they were interviewing him—"It's not about me; it's about the people of Ontario." No, Mr. Premier, it's all about you and your lack of leadership, your lack of policy development, your failure to protect Ontario jobs, and now your flight from Parliament, which is what a prorogation is all about and what this motion lays the groundwork for.

The Premier said to the press gallery with, I presume, a forced smile, because I'm sure he doesn't find this humorous, "Don't worry, next year is going to be a far better year." You know what, Speaker? This House is rising tomorrow. This Parliament may not resume for months, and it's not darn likely to be a far better year for workers in Ontario next year, as this government hides from its responsibilities and flees from its obligation to protect jobs, protect workers, protect their families, protect their kids, and to provide some relief for them in what are going to be, for a whole lot of folks, very, very difficult times.

I say to you that people should be very frightened of the message that this pre-prorogation motion sends. People should be very wary of a government that wants more than a two-month vacation this wintertime, and in the course of doing it will shut the doors to this legislative chamber and preserve for itself, I'm sure, the occasional photo op and media availability and announcement of something that's to come, because everything we've heard from these people so far has been stuff that's to come, and none of it's made-in-Ontario policy. Look, the government is contemplating proroguing, and this morning the Premier, once again—where has he been for the last three years? For years, the Premier of Ontario, Mr. McGuinty, has insisted that there wasn't a problem out there. We might have lost some jobs here and might have lost some jobs there, but we're a net creator of jobs—horsefeathers. Net creator of jobs? Horsefeathers, because we were losing good manufacturing jobs, unionized jobs, and resource sector jobs. When people were able to find work, it was minimum wage jobs, part-time jobs, temporary jobs.

We are in a crisis, and Mr. McGuinty appears to want Ontario's economic policy to be written in Washington, DC. Why, the economic development minister, Mr. Bryant, went down to Washington with his friend Tony Clement from Ottawa, and people weren't even answering the door when they came knocking. You get the image of Mr. Bryant, the Minister of Economic Development, standing there down in Washington, DC, trying to knock on the door of American political leaders, and they'd stare through the peephole, and then they'd run and turn the lights off and turn the TV down—you might have done that yourself from time to time—so that Mr. Bryant could keep knocking, thinking that maybe nobody was home. Nobody in Washington wanted to see him. Nobody in Washington wanted to talk to him.

Now, this morning Mr. McGuinty said that he's waiting for Washington. Let me tell you this, Speaker, please: If we rely on Washington to write the auto sector

stimulus package without writing our own independent auto sector stimulus package, and without developing a made-in-Ontario process, the United States will have all of our auto jobs, every single one of them. I don't want to see our children and grandchildren living in a Canada, living in an Ontario, that has been stripped of good jobs for which the high-wage economy is but a distant memory, and when social programs inevitably collapse. If working people, working folks, the working middle class aren't making decent wages, then nobody is paying taxes. If nobody is paying taxes, there are no social assistance programs, there's no public health care, there's no public safety. I, quite frankly, fear that this legislative gap that the Premier will create with his totally unjustifiable prorogation will be a huge time frame in which we may well see the restoration and the return of the Harris cutting policies. Do any of us want to suffer those again? Because the Harris cuts haven't been restored, and to cut more means to gut even further important public programs.

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The government has a majority. It's going to get this motion passed. Quite frankly, this motion isn't necessary for it to prorogue. What the motion does is preserve government bills in the event that the House does prorogue, because a prorogation, of course, means that all bills simply evaporate. They blow away like dust in the wind. But in the normal course of business—we're only about a year and a month or so since the election, a most unusual time for a prorogation, isn't it? A most unusual time in the midst of this economic crisis to not have this Parliament sitting and working and debating policies that just might save some jobs for a change—policies like Buy Ontario, something that Mr. Hampton and the NDP have been talking about for a long time; policies like an industrial hydro rate so that industry, heavy electricity users, will know with predictability what their electricity costs will be over a significant period of time; and when there's financial assistance to faltering industries, insisting that that assistance be accompanied by job guarantees. How many millions of dollars so far of taxpayers' money paid out by this government, cheque after cheque, with not a single job guarantee, resulted in yet more pink slips? You can bet your boots that down in Washington, DC, American political leadership is talking about the need for job guarantees, if and when they provide any financial assistance to faltering industries.

Let me say this: The failure of this government and now the impossibility of it to regulate those people just south of us here down in the financial district—why, there was a lobby group. You know we have lobby groups come in here from time to time. As a matter of fact, quite often they have little soirées in the evening, a couple of platters of cheese, some Ontario wine. There was a group of financial advisers, and I don't know what their organization was called but it was their lobby group. My colleague Paul Miller walked in there and said, "Good God, you guys should be wearing bags on your heads."

Do you know what's been happening out there? Ferd Slevar just died down in Welland. The "Mayor of Broadway" just passed away this week, a World War II veteran and hero in the RCAF and just a delightful man I've known all my life. Ferd Slevar operated a textile store for years. That's where women—my grandmother used to go there—bought textiles by the yard. She used to buy that striped ticking that you make the feather pillows with. That's what women in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s and long before that did. I know those people down in Welland South—a big Croatian community. They worked at Union Carbide; Union Carbide shut down. They worked at Atlas Steel; Atlas Steel was shut down. They worked hard, they worked dirty, they worked tough, they worked sick, and they saved money. They saved \$20,000, \$30,000. For a lot of those old-timers, making 80 cents and then \$1.20 and then \$1.50 and two bucks an hour, to save up \$20,000 or \$30,000 was pretty significant. It took a long time, but a whole lot of bankers and financial managers finally persuaded these people—some of them, not all of them, but far more of them than I wish—that the returns in a mutual fund would be far greater and would make them far more prosperous than the modest interest rates earned in a savings account. Do you know what's happened to those people's modest savings? They're gone. Disappeared.

You know, when I was a kid people used to worry about not living long enough. Now I talk to folks, seniors, in my constituency office, down at the Welland market, down at Canal Days, any number of places—the Wainfleet fair, wherever it is you want to go, which church basement, which Tim Hortons, which Legion Hall. When I was a kid, people worried about not living long enough. I'm talking to folks now who are worried about living too long, because they can't afford to stay alive. The "crisis"—oh, we treat it so clinically and so detached. The Freddie Macs, or whatever they are, of the world and the Enrons of the world and the thieving Conrad Blacks of the world—he's been convicted, sure and good; I only wish he were doing harder time—are the people who are in no small part the authors of the devastation that's being imposed upon folks who live down off Broadway Avenue in Welland South, hard-working folks.

The young families, the young ones like John Deere workers who worked overtime so they could put some money away into a mutual fund, into an RSP to supplement a pension, with fantasies of helping kids through college and university, fantasies of maybe spending a couple of weeks in the wintertime in a warm place when they retired at, oh, 58 or 59—first of all, there's no retirement in sight because there's no job to retire from. They got terminated. And again, those RSPs? All but worthless. "Oh, the market will rebound," the financial page writers say. Most of them are shills and hacks for the financial investment industry. The market will rebound, but it might just rebound at such a rate that a fellow maybe your age would have to live to be 140 before that money was ever recovered.

I have a great deal of difficulty—this is a sad, sad observation—that we in this chamber, 107 of us, are going to travel off to our ridings. I'll be here at Queen's Park throughout the weeks. I'm not sure I'll be here Christmas Day, but I'll be here a good chunk of that time. But others may be warming their toes in the tropical waters of the Caribbean while folks like where I come from are turning the furnace down yet a couple of more degrees to save a few more bucks on heating fuel, because they don't have any income. There's no paycheque, and you know what? They know that there's nothing left to be trained for.

These are desperate times, sad times, tragic times. We need political leadership that can and will rise to the occasion. Instead, we've got political leadership that revs up the engines, points the compass southbound and takes off on the first available airstrip. The prorogation that this motion facilitates—oh, it doesn't facilitate it; I have to tell you that. The government can prorogue with or without this motion. But the motion just makes life a little easier for the government, and I don't think that at this point in time anybody should be making life easier for this government. People should be demanding that this government fulfil responsibilities, that the voters call upon it to act when those voters—you don't need government when things are going well, do you?

Things aren't going well. Things are as tough as they've been for a long, long time. Things are as tough as

they've been since your grandparents' time, and I say, you don't need government to act on the economy when things are good; you need them to act when things are bad. Things are bad; real bad. And what does this government contemplate doing? Not just taking a two-month vacation, but extending that by Lord knows how many months more. Shame on Mr. McGuinty.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Smith has moved government motion B, a motion to carry over certain business of the House and its committees to the second session of the 39th Parliament in the event of the prorogation of the first session. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Carried.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House is adjourned until 10:30 of the clock, Thursday, December 11.

The House adjourned at 1652.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
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Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Broten, Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craiton, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	

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Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (LIB)	Huron–Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	

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Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres
		Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of International Trade and Investment / Ministre du Commerce international et de l'Investissement
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London–Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Tourism / Ministre du Tourisme
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier / Vice-premier ministre
		Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services / Ministre des Petites Entreprises et des Services aux consommateurs
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
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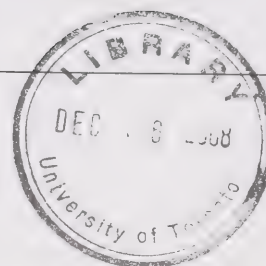
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Thursday 11 December 2008

Jeudi 11 décembre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 11 December 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 11 décembre 2008

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence for personal reflection and thought.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Good morning. I'd like to introduce the Legislature to the hard-working members of my constituency office who are down here in Queen's Park, Nancy Turner and Michael McDonald. Welcome, guys.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'd like to introduce, in the west members' gallery, Richard Goldford from Thornhill, along with his son Zack. Zack is just 13; it's his first question period. He's got an abiding interest in politics.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I'm pleased to introduce Katie Neu from my riding and her father, Tom. Katie is from Listowel, and she and her colleagues have started bullyingcanada.ca. We're delighted that they're here today to raise this issue with us here at the Legislature.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I'm very proud to introduce the vice-president of the political science club from Laurentian University, Jason Kontak, and welcome him to the Legislature to watch question period.

Mr. Joe Dickson: It's a pleasure to introduce three guests in the west gallery: Ray and Monica Hickey from Pickering Village in Ajax; and Ray's sister Marie Maschke, who is also deputy mayor of Hastings Highlands. I must tell you that Ray and Monica are co-chairs of our annual golf tournament in Ajax, which feeds 10 food banks. Marie, of course, is a very close friend of Leona Dombrowsky.

The guests are here today for lunch, compliments of the Honourable Gerry Phillips, who is a regular patron; Margaret Best; and, of course, the affable Minister George Smitherman.

Mr. Mario Sergio: I'd like to acknowledge my staff, both from my constituency office and my Queen's Park office. They are not here, because they are working very hard on behalf of the people of York West. But I would like to acknowledge them and wish them a very merry Christmas.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Je voudrais présenter Marie-Lise Leduc, qui est ici de mon bureau d'Ottawa, and I'd like to know if you're going to introduce the student? Okay, thank you.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I would like to introduce, in the east members' gallery, Diane McCrohan, Joe Nowak, Joe Brothers and Heather Rush, all from the riding of Kitchener-Conestoga.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Introductions? On behalf of page Sarah Danchuk, we'd like to welcome her father, Nick, her grandmother, Helen, and her grandfather, Peter, to the members' gallery today.

On behalf of page Luis Vera, we would like to welcome his mother, Lucy, and his father, Antonio, who made the trek down today. Welcome.

We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery visiting interns from the Quebec National Assembly: Olivier Bégin-Caouette, Pierre-Olivier Tremblay, Marc-André Turcotte, Pierre-Luc Turgeon and Marie-Astrid Ospina. Please join me in welcoming our guests today.

For anyone who is feeling left out because they were not introduced, welcome to everyone else who is visiting the chamber today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: A merry Christmas to you and your family, Speaker. And let me say that after a little over a year in that chair, I think you have done an outstanding job as Speaker. Hopefully, that will get me another 20 seconds.

My question is to the Minister of Economic Development—we were advised that he would be here today.

Hon. George Smitherman: He's on call and will be forthcoming, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'll go to the Deputy Premier.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Okay.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Minister, as we all know, since mid-September, when we returned to this House from the summer break, there has been a sea change in Ontario's economy. In the time we've been here this fall, almost 69,000 jobs have disappeared, driving the unemployment rate up to 7.1%. Housing starts have plummeted by 31%. Yesterday's Fraser Institute report on the Canadian investment climate was very troubling for the nation—Ontario's poor ranking. We ranked first or second, but in recent years the province has implemented policies that are not conducive to attracting investment.

Minister, when are you prepared, or why are you prepared, in any event, to leave this House without a meaningful jobs plan—a road map to get us through this difficult time?

Hon. George Smitherman: Thank you very much. Firstly, I do want to say in the spirit of the season that I want to wish the honourable member and some of his front-bench colleagues all of the possible successes, being part of the 18 senatorial appointments.

A serious question has been raised by the honourable member. Investments that our government has already initiated are designed to affect the employment circumstances for Ontarians, recognizing that the global economic crisis is very challenging. That's why just about \$10 billion in infrastructure spending this year is helping to sustain 100,000 jobs. That's not just about stimulus and jobs on the short term. It's about building an economy and an infrastructure which can support an economy to be more productive going forward. Alongside that, we've invested in Ontario's people, the single greatest source of future economic opportunity.

By way of supplementary, I will be happy to talk about more initiatives to the honourable member.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I should acknowledge the minister's lost Senate aspirations since his leadership candidate has dropped by the wayside.

In any event, as a supplementary, there was nothing in that response to give Ontarians any faith, any hope, any confidence in the government. In fact, over the last three months we've seen a complete lack of leadership from your side of the House. Instead, we've seen a government that has banned more activities than a preschool when it should have been working on getting Ontario's economy back on top where it traditionally has been.

Over the last three months, you've done nothing more than shrug your shoulders, blame somebody else, and now we're going on vacation, you're going on vacation, while hundreds of thousands of Ontarians are facing a very bleak Christmas and an even bleaker 2009.

Minister, when are we going to see a meaningful jobs plan for this province?

1040

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, if the honourable member wants to play out this ridiculous stereotype that when a Legislature is not in session, nobody's working, he can run down his own party, but he shouldn't be running down our government, because I'll be happy to take a meeting with that gentleman any time as we continue to work diligently on behalf of the people of the province of Ontario.

The honourable member said that for the last three months, there's been nothing done and there's been no investment. Why does the honourable member not stand up in this House and tell the people of the province of Ontario that he voted against budget measures which have resulted, just in the last little while, in a contribution of \$1.1 billion to every municipality in the province of Ontario for the purposes of making investments in infra-

structure, which is about jobs in the short term for people and about the infrastructure that can support the economic prospects and development in the province of Ontario? The member's characterizations are those of someone who has come late to the party, seeking to throw the mud around and offering—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: We look at what's happening in the United States with respect to the auto sector issue and the fact that both parties at the federal level there have been involved, in terms of conserving what's appropriate for taxpayers in the United States. This government has shut out the opposition parties—both opposition parties. We're prepared to come back next week and sit, listen, participate and play a role in assisting and ensuring—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Honourable members know that the tradition within this place is that we don't make reference to people who are or are not here.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: We all know the concerns. We know that 66,000 people in this province lost their jobs last month alone. We know many communities, families and individuals are suffering. If you're really sincere about working together to find solutions, make a commitment today. Come back next week—we'll be here.

Hon. George Smitherman: It's noteworthy. Today is Thursday. It wasn't convenient to be here, but if you come back next week, well, we'll see if we can drop by then. The work of government and the necessity of responding to the challenges, the very real and genuine challenges for people in the province of Ontario—is not met alone on whether the House is in session. It's met through the work that we do in our ridings and on a back-and-forth basis.

I would be very, very willing, as an example, in my areas of responsibility, to sit down with the honourable member any day next week or the week that follows to find what ideas he might have to bring forward and to support growth and economic development in the province of Ontario. But this member has stood against those efforts. He stood against the efforts to distribute \$1.1 billion to municipalities, including \$2.1 million to the city of Brockville alone.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My next question is to the Attorney General, and it's about the abysmal failings of our province's justice system.

Two weeks ago, Arber Krasniqi was convicted of second-degree murder for the unprovoked stabbing of Jordan Ormonde. According to the *Toronto Star*, since 2001, Krasniqi had five previous run-ins with the justice system, each of which involved either weapons or violence, and for those five occasions, the crown allowed

him to enter into a peace bond and withdrew the charges, even though some of them were violations of peace bonds as well.

Minister, these matters are no longer before the courts, so will you investigate these cases, including the crown's decision to repeatedly withdraw charges of violence against this killer, leaving him free to murder an innocent citizen?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The first thing we say, of course, is that in any of these terrible cases, there's a terrible tragedy, and our heart goes out to those who are left behind and our heart goes out to the communities affected.

My friend raises some very important questions. How do we make sure that in all cases, the justice system deals exactly as it must, in the most serious fashion, with the most serious cases? The crowns prosecute all of these very seriously, the police investigate them very seriously, and they prosecute according to the limits of the law. At all times, that is what we do, but we are working hard through our initiatives, such as our exit point task force, to make sure that in every case, the full extent of the law is brought to bear on those who pose the greatest danger to society.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The John and Varughese murders two months ago are another glaring example of how the broken justice system is failing to keep Ontarians safe.

We've read the bail hearing transcripts—I hope you have—where Nathaniel O'Brien, Susan and Saramma's alleged killer, was released on house arrest. The transcript raises some very serious questions about the crown's conduct on the bail hearing and whether she was properly prepared to run a bail hearing for two violent sexual assaults.

Minister, will you look into the crown's conduct in this case? The fact that this matter is still before the courts doesn't prevent you from conducting an investigation right now. Will you do it?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I won't have the member of the opposite party running down the hard-working people of our public service and the crown attorney's office. It's just wrong.

A number of times this member has asked questions purportedly on the basis of what he says are facts, but it turns out that he is dealing with, at best, a tight glance at the facts.

Crowns prosecute cases very seriously. They do today and they did when the member was in government. They prosecute according to the law, as they do today, as they did when the member was in government. They prosecute to the limits of the law.

What we've announced with the exit point task force are ways to make sure that we can heighten that attention in every way that the law allows.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It's clear and regrettable: The Attorney General clearly hasn't read those tran-

scripts. It's disappointing that he's not prepared to give Susan and Saramma's family some answers when it's the very least he could do.

In the O'Brien case, the bail hearing took place several months after his arrest, giving the crown more than ample time to gather all the necessary information on the accused to present for the judge's consideration. We believe that didn't happen in this case, and if you read the transcript, you may share that view. Attorney General, we'll provide you with the transcript so you can see it for yourself and see why we're so concerned about what happened in this court.

Will you commit to immediately looking into the crown's conduct in this case? Will you do that for the family?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: What I have committed to the family in that terrible tragedy, and to the community and to all Ontarians, is that in every case where there are serious issues before the courts, we will make sure that the crowns, the police and the other justice partners have everything they need to bring to the attention of the judge or the justice of the peace so that wherever we are able, we stop the most dangerous from being released or we keep them in custody longer.

I would simply caution that the fleeting glance into cases, based on half information, doesn't assist the family, doesn't assist the community and doesn't assist the pursuit of justice in that or any other case.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is to the acting Premier. I want to quote Windsor Mayor Eddie Francis: "The reality is that without immediate action by the government of Canada and the province of Ontario, this country and this province will lose a city." He then goes on to say that that's how dire things are.

The auto industry needs a short-term credit financing plan within days, not weeks. Without it the industry will sink, taking hundreds of thousands of jobs and communities like Windsor down with it. My question is this: When will the McGuinty government finally put forward a plan to deal with the auto industry's short-term cash and credit crunch?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Michael Bryant: As the mayor of Windsor knows better than anybody else, this is a North American industry. It's a North American industry under, obviously, a severe credit crunch, and it requires a North American solution. That means the two major providers of vehicles in North America, Canada and the United States, need to be collaborating together so that we don't have competing lenders. We cannot have lenders in Canada competing against lenders in the United States because there is in essence one borrower: the auto makers and the auto suppliers.

Yes, he's absolutely right that if we do not have a package in place, there are going to be severe conse-

quences. But I've said before and I'll say again that that mayor can have full confidence that in fact the governments of the United States and Canada will have that in place for that industry.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government talks about competing lenders. The fact of the matter is, there aren't any lenders. That's why American legislators have been seized with this. That is why they've called for plans. That's why they've examined those plans. That's why they've put forward a strategy, and their strategy includes job and product guarantees. But, increasingly, people are wondering, where is the McGuinty government? Where is the Ontario government?

We've put forward a number of ideas that we think need to be part of this. The government keeps responding with strategies that you announced three or four years ago that haven't worked and don't answer the dire need for immediate credit assistance. Where is the McGuinty government's plan, other than referring to Washington and Ottawa?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The work that Ontario and Canada have been doing is work that has been going on—with respect to support for the auto industry, the member is absolutely right: The McGuinty government has been there for the auto industry for years and years and years. It is obviously partly as a result of that investment and the relationship with the CAW and with the companies themselves and, I should also add, with Detroit and Honda and with all the auto suppliers, that in fact we have been working with the industry—and every time we have been in discussions with American officials, we find that Canada is further along than the United States.

The simple fact is that you've got Congress putting a bill together that in essence is going to line up the mechanism by which the Detroit Three are going to be provided financing relief.

As the Prime Minister has said and the Premier has said, Canada will—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I want to quote Mayor Francis again.

"The combined loss, and impact on the community, will be staggering.

"At this stage, a refusal by the federal and provincial government to act immediately is nothing less than a decision to allow the death of a community."

That's what Mayor Francis says his community is looking at. Yet, when they ask this government what the plan is for immediate credit assistance—and we're not talking here about grants; we're not talking here about an investment strategy to kick in in two or three years; we're talking about immediate credit assistance, so that a plant is not closed within the next 30 days.

Again, I say, where is the McGuinty government's plan? Referring to Washington, referring to Ottawa, isn't doing it. The plant closures will happen here.

Hon. Michael Bryant: If in fact the mayor of Windsor had had the plan provided by the leader of the third party over the past six or seven years, all across Ontario we would not have seen the growth that we've seen, and we would have seen plant closures.

The fact is that this government has always been there for the auto industry. We've been there for the workers; we've been there for the management. We will be there to provide the emergency and urgent financial assistance. The mechanism in which it's provided is pretty important because it involves taxpayers' dollars.

The leader of the third party has spent most of his time in this House on the auto sector slagging it, slagging the CAW, and slagging every effort this government has made to provide assistance to the industry. So we don't need to take any advice from the leader of the third party.

The bottom line is, when it comes to auto—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: I'm sure all those laid-off auto workers are very aware of the ineffectiveness of the McGuinty government's strategy when it comes to the auto sector.

I want to ask the Acting Premier about the continuing crisis that is unfolding in the forest sector. We learned last night that AbitibiBowater is looking to sell its hydro dams in and near Kenora, in and near Fort Frances, and in and near Iroquois Falls. These hydro dams provide reasonably priced electricity to the pulp and paper mills that sustain literally over 2,000 jobs. The sale of these dams will mean higher hydro rates for those mills and will put more jobs in jeopardy. What is the McGuinty government prepared to do to avoid that?

Hon. George Smitherman: I thank the honourable member for his question. In the matters associated with the forest industry and the related matters of energy production that comes from facilities and the costs of industrial pricing, I can tell the honourable member that, working with the Minister of Natural Resources, the pre-disposition of our government will be to seek to lend support wherever it's possible to the companies and, by extension, to the people who depend upon them for economic opportunities.

The member brings to the floor of the Legislature an emerging issue. Perhaps we can all agree that it could be seen as an opportunity. In that spirit, I'll be working closely with the Minister of Natural Resources to see what's possible to sustain the efforts of that company, at economic development to sustain those communities and to make sure that people are employed. Energy pricing and related matters are certainly something that we'll work on as part of the mix at the suggestion of the honourable member.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: About the only thing this government has done is drive the industrial hydro rate for

these mills up to literally the highest in all of Canada. So a paper mill in Ontario is now paying an industrial hydro bill of about \$2.4 million a month, while one in British Columbia is paying about \$1.1 million a month, and a mill in Manitoba is paying about \$970,000 a month. For example, Domtar in Dryden, which just shut down two paper machines, saw its hydro bill increase by 40% over the last four years. AbitibiBowater's energy bills have risen from \$40 million to \$90 million.

Here's the issue: These companies are being pressed in terms of credit. If they sell off their hydro assets, they may get some quick money, but it's going to make the jobs that are there less sustainable. What's the McGuinty government going to do—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, just like the earlier question, the honourable member transitions deftly to his position of the day, but it's important to remind him from his often-referenced and lowly read book, *Public Power*, "Industrial energy price subsidization can be attractive in theory, but tricky in practice...."

I think it is far better to work with industry to lower its energy costs through greater efficiency, not through a scheme of subsidized rates. The putative leader of the party, the member from Toronto—Danforth, is in fact on record as saying that he opposes any policy of industrial price subsidization. But we've taken advice from the honourable member in working directly through the Ministry of Natural Resources on efforts to stabilize prices in these sectors and, through prosperity investments, to work with those companies that transition to a lower energy price, at the very suggestion from page 251 of the honourable member's book.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: And no one is talking about price subsidization here. What we're talking about is what every other province in Canada does, which is to sustain an industrial hydro rate which helps to maintain jobs. It is the McGuinty government that is out of step with literally every other province.

These mills, if they were located in Manitoba, in British Columbia, in Newfoundland and Labrador, in Quebec, in Saskatchewan or British Columbia, would all have much lower hydro rates. But the strategy that the McGuinty government has pushed them into, "Sell off your hydro assets which provide affordable electricity to the mills in order to obtain some short-term cash," means that the jobs that are in those mills now become less sustainable. Is this the McGuinty government's real policy? Force them to sell off the hydro assets to get some cash, making the jobs in the mills less sustainable? Is that your forest policy—I mean, your industrial—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member's suggestion that government policy has forced the forestry sector to the challenges that they're experiencing

does not bear up to any scrutiny at all. The honourable member ran through a list of Canadian provinces that could have equally been the list of Canadian provinces that have seen shutdowns and job losses in their domestic forest industry. That's not of interest to the honourable member because that clouds his storyline for today.

Of the matter at hand, associated with the prospect of a transition from ownership of a hydroelectric property, I already said to the honourable member in our first answer, working with the Minister of Natural Resources, we'll do all that we can to sustain those companies, to sustain those factories, those plants, those mills and to sustain those jobs. This will be our focus going forward and we're very open to any input that the honourable member might have of a practical nature to see those transactions take place in a way that helps us sustain these jobs. On that point we agree with him—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

1100

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Minister of Health. Minister, I'm very grateful for the support that you and all of the members of this House gave last week to my private member's resolution, which is resulting in the creation of a select committee to develop a provincial mental health strategy. But as you know, the Auditor General's report that was just released has revealed some glaring problems with our mental health system which are urgent in nature.

Minister, can you please tell us what's been done so far to constitute the committee and what the plan is going forward?

Hon. David Caplan: There are a number of things I'd like to mention to the member. We certainly do support, and thank her for bringing forward, the suggestion. I believe in the New Year the House leaders will get together to figure out the composition, the mandates and what the next steps for the committee will be. I quite eagerly anticipate being able to get the information and the direction that the committee is able to come up with. In the meantime, this month I will be meeting with the advisory panel of experts from across the province which I have put together. This will be another opportunity to develop a provincial mental health and addiction strategy.

I think it's also important to remember that the auditor, in his report, comments on a number of the very—truly, while there is much more work to do, there are many positive aspects. For example, funding has gone toward things like assertive community treatment teams, which are multidisciplinary teams that provide—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Thank you, Minister. I can only say that, because the need is urgent—and we do have members on this side of the House who are willing to sit during the winter session. Will you tell us whether

you're prepared to commit to us getting started with this committee right away in the winter session? The need is truly urgent, as the auditor has rightly pointed out.

Hon. David Caplan: I think I answered that question in the first response. I'm happy to reiterate for the member that House leaders will be gathering together, as they do when we have select committees, to work out timetables, to work out composition of the committee, to work out new resources that would need to be in place to support the work of the committee. I'm quite eager to work with the member and with all members of this Legislature to improve the quality and the availability of mental health and addiction services to Ontario's most vulnerable.

I truly believe that it is a measure of our collective humanity, the way that we treat those who are the most vulnerable, and that includes the mentally ill and those who suffer from mental health and addictions issues. I am quite proud of the work we have done so far, which has seen a \$200-million increase to mental health and addictions funding in the province of Ontario. I do acknowledge that there is—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, in follow-up to the question from my leader in regard to Abitibi. Minister, we told you, the municipality told you, the union told you, the economic development people told you two years ago that if you allowed Abitibi to sever these dams off, eventually they'd fire-sale the dams for cash flow and it would put these mills at risk because the cost of operations would go up at least \$100 to \$120 per tonne. These communities are more than willing to buy these dams. If Abitibi is going to sell them, the communities are more than willing to buy them.

My question to you is simply this: Are you prepared to sit down with those communities and assist with the financing to purchase those dams so that they can keep them in their possession in order to sell electricity at cost to those mills and maintain those jobs?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. George Smitherman: Yes, at the heart of it, we are, as I said earlier in my answer, prepared to work with all of those who have a stake in the ambition of helping to preserve jobs. If this is one piece of those mechanisms that is necessary, then I can tell the honourable member that we'd be very happy to sit down and have a meeting. The honourable member makes a very specific policy suggestion which gets well ahead of the situation into issues of ownership. But at the heart of the matter, yes, we recognize it will be necessary, through our various ministries and local honourable members, to work to bring people together and seek the resolution which we all share a desire to, which is to sustain jobs in local com-

munities. I'd be very happy to work with the honourable member.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: We've heard this song before. Here's the problem. Two years ago, when we had the same situation, the then Minister of Natural Resources, Mr. Ramsay, said "Don't worry; everything will be fine. This will never happen." The community and everybody rang the bell two years ago, and I'm putting the question to you straight, Minister: If Abitibi is going to go down this road, if they're going to fire-sale their mills—and we know why; they're having difficulty—are you going to guarantee that your government is going to stand up and say, "Yes, we will help to finance the purchase of those dams on the part of the municipalities so they can safeguard the jobs for the people of Kenora, Fort Frances and Iroquois Falls"?

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member knows that the question has been answered. The honourable member has already decided on what the mechanism is.

At the heart of the matter is the desire to make sure that the advantage of this energy source can be brought to bear in the context of these plants. That is the goal. The matter of who will own them is a matter that can be addressed in the context of an accurate discussion. The honourable member will have the benefit of giving us his advice and presenting to us local communities and their views on this. I think the honourable member and I have a history of a capacity to work together on that with my other government colleagues.

We will do our utmost to seek all possible solutions to preserve the jobs in those communities, which we understand to be job one in this circumstance.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Minister, in this time of economic slowdown, it is crucial that we continue to invest in the programs and services that will help laid-off workers get the help they need to get back on their feet. We have heard a lot recently about training programs available through your ministry that provide financial assistance to those who wish to go back to school to upgrade their skills. I am aware that your ministry responds to layoffs immediately and in some cases provides support for services targeted directly to those who find themselves in this unfortunate situation.

You have spoken several times about Employment Ontario and how these programs are available to people who need assistance with finding a job. But, Minister, it is not always the case that people need to find an existing job. History has shown that Ontarians are very enterprising and full of great ideas that create marketable products and viable companies. Can you tell me what you are doing to help those who find themselves without a job but with a great business idea?

Hon. John Milloy: I want to thank the member for the question and for her advocacy on behalf of her community.

Through Employment Ontario, recently laid-off workers have access to a program, the Ontario self-employment benefit. Through this program, individuals are provided financial assistance and business planning advice to help them start their own business. The program has been a great success. I'd like to give one example to the House: In Ottawa, a gentleman by the name of Marc Appleby received a living allowance through this program over the course of 52 weeks while he developed his business plan and then implemented it. Through the National Capital Region YMCA-YWCA in Ottawa, Marc participated in workshops, one-on-one business consultation, business planning and networking. Marc went on to be a guest on the popular CBC show *Dragons' Den* and was offered an impressive \$500,000 for his product idea. His product, known as EcoTraction, is the world's safest and most effective—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: That's excellent news, Minister.

In these challenging times, communities are having difficulties adapting to changes. It is crucial for everyone in the community to work together to develop solutions on how to move forward. Local economic development officers are working hard with businesses and community organizations to ensure that jobs remain and people have the help that they need, but they cannot do it alone. At a time when our economy is changing and labour market demands are evolving, we need to be supporting communities in order to adjust. Human resource planning is essential at a time like this, and I'm glad to see that our government is helping some communities meet those needs.

In my area, newcomers make up a significant portion of the labour market. I was pleased to hear that COSTI Immigrant Services was provided \$149,000 to manage the open doors project that will help newcomers adjust and assist employers in fulfilling their hiring needs. Minister, could you please tell this House more about—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. John Milloy: I'm pleased to provide more details on this program. In partnership with several community organizations across York region, COSTI will manage a project that will develop an in-depth analysis of adjustment supports in York region and Bradford West Gwillimbury to help newcomers to Canada. The analysis will identify barriers to employment services that will assist newcomers find work and help employers realize their hiring needs.

The grant was provided through Employment Ontario's labour market partnership program. Labour market partnerships, or LMPs, support partnerships among employers, employer-employee associations and community organizations. The program is intended to help partners address identified labour market issues, develop and implement strategies to improve their ability to plan for their human resource needs and implement labour force adjustment measures to deal with changes in the labour market.

1110

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Tim Hudak: I have a question to the Minister of Health. Minister, I want to update you on the tragic story of Andrew Lanese, an 11-year-old boy in Fonthill who suffers from Hunter syndrome, and I do appreciate your personal attention to this matter in the past. His family has privately paid for Elaprase treatment since August, at the cost of \$6,000 per week. Minister, the results since August are remarkable: For the first time since he was stricken with Hunter syndrome, Andrew can hold a toy in his hands. He can now walk unassisted about 80 feet away from his wheelchair without taking a break, where he could barely manage 20 feet before. When their funds run out in a few weeks, the remarkable progress Andrew has made over the past five months will be lost. Minister, will you fund Elaprase treatment for Andrew Lanese?

Hon. David Caplan: First of all, I want to thank the member for the question. He has advocated with me before on behalf of Andrew and his family. I know we are working to resolve Andrew's situation, so I certainly do want to acknowledge that. I also want to say, if I could, through you, Speaker, directly to Andrew and his family—I certainly do understand the circumstances and the difficulty that this does have for families, and I want to take this opportunity to express my very deepest sympathies and thoughts with them.

I'd like to share with you that all of our drug funding decisions must be made through an informed decision-making based on the analysis of scientific evidence and cost-effectiveness. Recently, the ministry has publicly communicated that we are working on a new approach for drugs for rare diseases and we do intend to share it. In fact, Canada is one of the few countries in the world which does not have such a program on—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I appreciate the minister's response and the tone of it. I think as the minister knows, the Ministry of Health is currently funding treatment for two Ontario residents afflicted with Hunter syndrome, yet Andrew was recently denied again. The only difference between those who are funded and young Andrew is that he has, sadly, suffered neurological trauma. In short, he has brain damage.

But it doesn't make him any less human. His suffering is no less painful or tragic; in fact, more so. If you witness the progress Andrew has made, you could not deny that he is making significant progress from this treatment. His parents are seeing laughing and giggling again for the first time in years. Minister, you can't draw the line at Andrew Lanese. Will you make every effort to ensure he gets that funding?

Hon. David Caplan: While I do acknowledge that not every case will be funded, there will be instances when, after reviewing the relevant documentation, the executive officer and the committee which has been struck will have to, regrettably, deny funding.

However, funding for rare diseases must continue to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. We must ensure that patients will be likely to benefit from a slowing in the progression of the disease, if not a reversal of the disease. That's why we have taken the steps to institute this kind of review and this kind of process, so that individual Ontario patients and the individual circumstances they face can be reviewed by the executive officer and by experts. I have, as I said earlier, worked with the member and will continue to work to see what can be done. I cannot give the undertaking that it will be funded, but the process that it was reviewed—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Sudbury Regional Hospital is in crisis due to its high number of alternate level-of-care clients. St. Joseph's Health Centre in Sudbury has asked the minister for an advance of \$4 million in capital funding so it can begin construction of their 128 long-term-care-bed home in Chelmsford, which would ease the ALC crisis. Will the minister commit to providing this funding today?

Hon. David Caplan: I just want to note that I am encouraged that the hospital is working collaboratively with the LHIN and the neighbouring hospitals in the region. The LHIN will continue to support the efforts to reduce the ALC pressure. I have been to Sudbury and I do acknowledge that this is a real challenge in Sudbury and the northeast, but we must manage our funds responsibly for the short- and for the long-term benefit.

In direct answer to the member, no, I will not commit and I will not be funding Sudbury and providing them a separate capital advance. We will continue to work with St. Joe's to deliver on the commitment toward expanded long-term-care beds. I know that we have spoken about this privately, but I do say publicly the same answer that I provided for you, that we will not be looking to a different kind of capital model. We will be looking to support them in the same way we do all long-term-care homes across the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Sudbury is experiencing a hospital crisis like no other in Ontario. Two weeks ago, more than 250 physicians at Sudbury Regional spoke out in anger and frustration about this ALC crisis which has forced the cancellations of hundreds of surgeries, jammed up our emergency rooms, and compromised the daily operation of Sudbury Regional Hospital. Everyone—residents, physicians, the mayor and even, I hope, the MPP from Sudbury—wants St. Joseph's Health Centre to move forward with the long-term-care homes which will help ease the ALC crisis in Sudbury hospitals. I ask again: Why won't the ministry agree to a funding advance?

Hon. David Caplan: We are committed to moving ahead with the construction of more long-term-care

capacity in Sudbury and Chelmsford, as the member is well aware. But the member would be aware that, in fact, just yesterday, the former mayor of Sudbury, Jim Gordon, who was tasked by Mayor Rodriguez to provide some insight and strategy for Sudbury, said, "I want to praise the provincial government as a willing partner in finding solutions. The province has not turned their backs on us, I can tell you that. While the province will be called upon to do more, local officials will work to develop innovative proposals that are efficient and cost-effective."

It is by this working together, this coming together of the local hospital, the LHIN, long-term-care providers, the local members and many, many others that we are going to break the back of ALC in Sudbury. I would welcome the member—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Khalil Ramal: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, you know that food safety is important for all of us. Also, it's a top priority for our government. Last week, the Auditor General released his report and commends the government for taking very important steps toward making sure the food we eat on a daily basis is safe, and also by establishing many different measurements in order to make sure all the milk, especially goat's milk, we drink on a daily basis—or some people do—is safe. As you know, in his report in 2001, he raised a couple of recommendations toward this issue. Regardless of our progress, the Auditor General raised a couple of issues about food safety. Can you tell us what you are doing in order to make sure the food we eat on a daily basis is safe?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: The honourable member has raised a very important question, and I do want to say that our government appreciates the report from the Provincial Auditor. We do appreciate that it has been recognized that Ontario has one of the strongest food safety systems in Canada. It has been the McGuinty government that commissioned the Haines Report. As a result of that, we have committed to implementing those recommendations. As of now, fully 80% of those recommendations with respect to food safety in the province have been implemented. That is why our government has doubled the food safety budget at OMAFRA from \$27 million in 2005-06 to \$46 million in 2008-09—almost double. We've increased the number of meat inspectors. When we came to government there were 10 meat inspectors in the province of Ontario.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Is that all?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Only 10. We now have 170 meat inspectors in the province of Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you, Minister, for this information. I think it's very important to all people

across the province to know that our government is taking very important steps to make sure that the food we eat on a daily basis is safe. But as you know, Minister, we cannot control the whole spectrum of food safety. The federal government also plays a pivotal role. Can you tell us what you are doing in conjunction with the federal government to make sure the food that comes to this province is safe?

1120

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: We work very closely with the federal government on food safety initiatives. It is a shared jurisdiction, so there are some processing plants that are the federal government's responsibility and some that are the provincial government's responsibility.

I would like to say that the auditor did note that we've already made some of our systems even more safe. The audit was done in the spring; we have, over the course of the summer and fall months, been acting. We have implemented microbial testing on ready-to-eat meats; that will be fully implemented in January 2009. We continue to work with food processors to enable them to be HACCP-qualified; that is, the hazard analysis critical control points program. This is a quality control program. We continue to work with industry to put in place a traceability system, and we will continue to pay \$200 of the \$300 registration fee for mandatory food—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Health. Minister, earlier this week, I brought to your attention an urgent plea from Greg Troy for the drug Myozyme to treat Pompe disease. Helen Stevenson, the executive officer, stated that she could see it approved in late March. To that, Mr. Troy's wife, Ana, says that she worries the approval won't come in time for her husband because they've seen his condition deteriorating daily. We have to move pretty soon or it will be too late.

I'm asking you today, Minister, would you consider, on a compassionate basis, providing funding for this drug for Mr. Troy?

Hon. David Caplan: Of course, I have nothing but compassion for Mr. Troy and for all Ontarians who suffer from rare diseases, where the normal clinical trials and approvals would never result in approval of these therapies; the numbers simply do not allow it. That's why Ontario has moved to implement a process and an arrangement based upon medical expertise and the advice of clinicians, practitioners and others to be a part of that decision-making process.

The member would know that we have approximately 200,000 of these types of requests per year. We are developing a fair and reasonable way to be able to address them, and we are moving as quickly as we possibly can. The member knows that this—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: To the minister: The minister knows full well the drug was approved by Health Canada in 2006. There are at least 30 other countries in the world that fund it, as does, now, Alberta. Also, Ian MacPherson, an adult from Hamilton who has received the drug now for three years, has demonstrated that the progression of the disease can be halted. He is now able to get up, and it has improved his walking and breathing. Surely Greg Troy deserves the same improvement and shouldn't be struggling for each breath of air he takes each day.

Minister, I ask you, as we end this session, will you seriously consider responding to his request for this drug now?

Hon. David Caplan: I hope the member is fully aware, and I know she is, that Ontario really is at the forefront of moving as quickly as we possibly can to be able to determine—and it's done on a case-by-case basis—the efficacy and ability of these new therapies and treatments being available in the individual cases. Certainly I know that, as a former Minister of Health, she knows that we do rely upon the advice of medical experts and others to be able to provide that kind of advice and guidance. I know that these are some of the most challenging cases, and it's one of the reasons why I have been, along with my colleagues from across the country, calling upon our national government. Canada is one of the very few countries in the world which do not have a national program for drugs for rare diseases.

This has been part of the work that I, along with colleagues from across the country, have been engaged in, but I would certainly welcome this member's efforts in being able to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

UNIVERSITY LABOUR DISPUTES

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Today the teaching assistants, student instructors, lab demonstrators and monitors at the University of Toronto are prepared to strike. York University workers are already on strike, and other universities are set to follow. How many students will have to have their education disrupted before your ministry provides the funding required to adequately staff universities and fairly compensate those who teach them?

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciate the member's question. In terms of the situation at the University of Toronto, I understand that both sides are working very hard to reach an agreement, and certainly we encourage them to come to an agreement as quickly as possible and not in any way disrupt classes.

At the same time, at York University we continue to encourage both sides to come to the table and come up with an agreement that's in the best interests of the students as quickly as possible.

The member raises the issue of operating funding. I would like to put on the record that at the University of Toronto, operating funding has increased by \$150 million

since 2003. That's an almost 40% increase. At York, operating funding has increased by \$100 million, or 52%, since 2003.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The only thing your lists add up to, Minister, is number 10 in per capita post-secondary funding. For students and their parents, the numbers you read in the House only add up to rising tuition, classes of 800 and 900 students, tutorials of 70 to 100 students, subsistence wages and disruption of studies.

When will your ministry end the turmoil and provide the funding so that Ontario can be a leader in post-secondary education again?

Hon. John Milloy: I would hope that the honourable member would be urging both sides in all these issues to sit at the table and come up with an agreement that's in the best interests of all students. But how can he stand in this House and dismiss a \$6.2-billion investment in terms of post-secondary education?

Operating funding for colleges and universities has increased by 58% since 2003. We have 100,000 additional students in colleges and universities. We've significantly increased per student funding. When the NDP were in power, they cut student aid by nearly 50%; they cut funding to PSE; they promised to eliminate tuition, and instead, they increased it by 50%.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Bob Delaney: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, in the three cities comprising Peel region in particular, and in the 905 belt in general, the need for social housing is higher than most anywhere in the province. Addressing the needs identified by housing providers in Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon would mean a greater life expectancy of affordable housing units, in addition to improving energy efficiency and the value of the property and community life.

Minister, in this year's budget, \$100 million was dedicated to social housing repairs. I'd like to make sure that the cities of Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon receive their fair per capita share of social housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: Well, allow me to thank the member and all members from Peel region for their advocacy for affordable housing. I would also like to thank the regional chair from Peel, Emil Kolb.

Peel region received \$5.5 million in affordable housing repair and retrofit money. The region of Peel has proposed to use its share to fund capital works projects at Fletcher's Creek Co-op in Mississauga, which the honourable member and I had the opportunity to visit, Northwood Park Co-op in Brampton and for other housing providers in Peel that have demonstrated need or have little or no capital reserve left.

Let me quote regional chair Emil Kolb when he said, "We are pleased that the province is committed to helping us improve our affordable housing situation in Peel region. The region looks forward to strengthening our partnerships with the federal and provincial governments

to help families continue to live in a home they can enjoy."

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary? The member from Mississauga South.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Minister, I can tell you that \$5.5 million is not enough to fix the backlog of repairs at Peel region. I've met with representatives from the region on a number of occasions, as well as constituents, who have experienced first-hand the shortage of affordable housing in Mississauga specifically. Peel is making their own investments, but they need more than just funding for housing repairs. Our community needs new units as well.

In light of our government's landmark commitment to reduce child poverty at 25% in five years, it is crucial that we get fundamentals like housing right. Our high-growth region has only 14,000 units of affordable housing, and as we continue to grow, the need for affordable housing increases. Peel region has one of the highest wait times for affordable housing in the province, and some of my constituents are on the waiting list. What will you, minister, do to work with the Peel region and build more affordable housing?

Hon. Jim Watson: I thank the honourable member. That kind of passion is important when it comes to dealing with affordable housing because it's such an important part of our society and our life as a civilized society. There is more that we have to do. That's why the affordable housing program, which was signed by my predecessor and the previous federal government, contributed \$47 million for 1,401 units in Peel region.

I'd also like to congratulate Peel region because, when the Minister of Finance brought forward the Investing in Ontario Act, it provided \$1.1 billion in infrastructure money to municipalities. Peel region, I'm very pleased to report, is using the major part of its \$67 million from the act for affordable housing. They will build 400 units of affordable housing; \$60 million will go to 200 family units in Brampton and 200 units in Mississauga. We know that investing in infrastructure is investing in jobs.

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Minister, our caucus is becoming very concerned over your handling of the nuclear procurement issue. You don't seem to understand the importance of it.

December 31 this year was supposed to be the deadline for submissions. You delayed that. You've delayed the final decision at a cost of hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars. The number of bidders changes depending on whom you are talking to or the day of the week. Ontario is a leader in the nuclear industry, and the nuclear industry provides thousands of jobs. Minister, will you ensure this House that you will put a stop to last-second changes, back-of-the-napkin plans, and get on with the nuclear decision that is right for—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. George Smitherman: This is the same honourable member who in a question not five weeks ago stood up and said, "Is it appropriate, in the challenging times of global economic crisis, that you should continue on matters of procurement for capital efforts which are substantially smaller than the procurement of two new nuclear reactors?" We're committed to these reactors. We said that by the end of the spring we will have determined who the proponent is to build those two nuclear reactors at Darlington that will be operated by Ontario Power Generation. Any lack of clarity on these points is being driven by the honourable member's own inability to keep up with the play.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That question was on an RFP for renewable energy, and you said there would be no delay. Minister, Ontario lost 66,000 jobs last month, many of those in the manufacturing industry, which are good, high-paying jobs. Considering that your government is considering billions of dollars of aid to preserve Ontario jobs in the auto sector, do you even realize how many jobs are dependent on the nuclear sector in this province? The nuclear sector, and AECL in particular, employs thousands and thousands of people in this province. I'm going to ask the minister: Have you even thought to consider, or do you even know, how many jobs are at risk or will be lost if AECL is not successful in the bidding process for these new reactors?

Hon. George Smitherman: It's the honourable member's point of view that on one of the biggest purchases any jurisdiction could make, we should set aside all proper consideration of productivity of the investment and decide, on an emotional basis, only to support a company which has a presence in the honourable member's riding. When he raised this issue last time, I said, "Would you do me a favour? Would you talk to Cheryl Gallant? Will you talk to your federal member?" Because the government of Canada is the sole shareholder of Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd.

We want a good bid from them. We've made sure that in the time of a new government coming to life, they have the appropriate opportunity to make a decision and to lend support to the company that they own 100%. In the tender documents themselves, we have given ample opportunity for a domestic company to make the point about the very economic foundations the honourable member references.

This process is designed well for them. We look forward to a good, competitive bid from Atomic Energy of Canada, backed up by the government of Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question. The member from Toronto—Danforth.

Interjections.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's nice to be popular. What can I say?

To the Minister of Natural Resources: As she may well be aware—

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Calm your disappointment, colleagues.

Minister, as you may know, Canada has put the snapping turtle on its list of species at risk. You're considering a regulation to allow hunting of the snapping turtle in Ontario's newest park, Kawartha Highlands. Why are you doing that?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I thank the member for the question.

As the member knows, when a species is identified at the federal level, it actually goes through our committee, which is called COSSARO. COSSARO identifies whether or not that species is in Ontario, and then we put that species on the same list of species at risk, and then that species is removed from any opportunity for hunting and is in fact protected. That will automatically happen.

As a matter of fact, COSSARO has met. There are a number of new species, unfortunately, that are on the list, but we will be protecting all of them. The member needn't worry.

REPORT, INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a report of the Integrity Commissioner responding to the request by the member for Guelph for the Integrity Commissioner's opinion on whether the member for Halton had breached the Members' Integrity Act and parliamentary convention.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I also want to take this opportunity to thank our tremendous group of pages and wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Oh, I hear somebody from the government side asking to come back next week.

SEASON'S GREETINGS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just want to take this opportunity as well, on behalf of the table and all the staff at the Legislative Assembly, to wish all the members all the best. Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, happy holidays. I truly just want to say thank you to all of you for the co-operation that you've provided over the past year. There have been a few instances, but for the most part—if every session could be like today, we could make a lot of good things happen. All the best to everyone over the holidays.

This House stands recessed until 1 this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1138 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I'm delighted to introduce to the members Mr. William Wen, whose father owned the

largest restaurant ever in Toronto, the Sai Woo. His father also received the Order of Canada and he has raised millions of dollars for charity.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I'd like to introduce to the House my co-op student, Tahiya Bakht. She's here with us today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ISRAELI APARTHEID WEEK

Mr. Peter Shurman: In this, my last statement before we break for the holidays, I want to address all the members of this Legislature and ask that they join me in condemning Israeli Apartheid Week, which will be held for the fifth consecutive year, this time at the beginning of March, perhaps before we return to deliberations.

As Canadians, we have a proud history of advocating for an end to apartheid in South Africa, and we fully condemn the human rights violations committed by that regime.

To describe Israel—a democratic state that, like Canada, respects the rule of law—as such a regime is not only unsubstantiated but is also a minimization of the struggles of those who suffered under true apartheid rule. There is indeed room for discussion on Israeli policies, but to equate this democratic country with an apartheid state reflects a lack of understanding of the true meaning of that word. The term “apartheid” belongs in the same category as such terrifying words as “genocide.” Neither should be used carelessly; otherwise, they will become meaningless and their true victims will be forgotten.

Debate on Israeli policies should be encouraged, but it should also be based on fact and forgo the use of terminology that serves only to demonize an opposing point of view and confuse history.

On behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, I deplore any equation of Israel with an apartheid regime and ask for all members of this Legislature to join us in condemning Israeli Apartheid Week.

WARDENS OF GLENGARRY, STORMONT AND DUNDAS

PRÉFETS DE GLENGARRY, STORMONT ET DUNDAS

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: It is with appreciation and thanks that I rise to congratulate Estella Rose on her tenure as warden of the united counties of Glengarry, Stormont and Dundas. Last year, Mrs. Rose, a grandmother, a dairy farmer, and a no-nonsense politician, became the first female warden of the united counties in their 157-year history.

Mrs. Rose has had several firsts in her long political career. She served as the first female councillor in Moun-
tain township, and later as its first female reeve. In 1957,

Mrs. Rose was crowned Dundas county's very first Dairy Princess.

J'aimerais féliciter M^{me} Rose pour tout son travail, son dévouement et son esprit d'avant-garde.

As Mrs. Rose moves on from her post, I am proud to announce that Chris McDonell has become the new warden of the united counties of Glengarry, Stormont and Dundas. Mr. McDonell was sworn in last Friday in Cornwall. He is following in the footsteps of his brother, Jim McDonell, who was the warden in 2005. The occasion marks the first time in the counties' history that brothers have held the office of warden.

Félicitations à M^{me} Rose ainsi qu'à M. McDonell. Au nom des citoyens et citoyennes de Stormont, Dundas et Glengarry, je vous remercie.

ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I would like to make all members aware of an important issue for Ontario disability support program recipients and their families when they have to travel to obtain health care services and for medical services and appointments.

The Ministry of Community and Social Services has set a rate of 18 cents a kilometre for individuals residing in a group home setting who need to attend medical appointments. This rate was set over 10 years ago and hasn't been touched since.

For ODSP recipients to receive the reimbursement for their mileage, they must first go through an application process which includes presenting the mileage form to a physician for completion—for which, of course, there usually is a fee charged.

Everyone knows what has happened to gasoline prices in the last 10 years, yet the ministry has not adjusted the mileage rate for ODSP recipients. Eighteen cents per kilometre is not enough to cover the cost of travel in 2008. This is a serious issue, as it can impair a person's ability to visit their doctor and receive their needed medical attention.

As public sector employees, government employees and MPPs are currently reimbursed at a rate of 44 cents per kilometre. Compare that to a rate of 18 cents for ODSP recipients and you can clearly see that the ministry is once again failing to meet the needs of disabled people in Ontario.

CHILD PROTECTION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: On September 14, 1992, a little girl named Holly Jones was born. She wanted to become a famous singer, a world-renowned superstar. She wanted to travel the world and see everything, to climb mountains and explore. She was courageous, brave, confident and an adventurer. On May 12, 2003, she was abducted in plain daylight and she was viciously murdered.

Yesterday, her parents came to Queen's Park. They had one request: that they leave a tribute in Holly's

memory so that other children don't experience abuse. In their honour and in Holly's honour, I tabled a motion—and I hope for all-party support on this—"That, in the opinion of this House, primary prevention programs such as the Boost Child Abuse Prevention and Intervention program be mandatory in all Ontario elementary schools as requested by" her family. It is now available in many schools, but it is not available in all schools and it is not mandatory for all children.

This is what her family has decided to do in honour and as a tribute to the memory of their little girl, to the memory of this wonderful child who was once part of my riding. I stand today in honour of Holly Jones.

PEOPLE OF THE WORLD INSCRIBE THE BIBLE

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: On Tuesday, December 16, a special community project will be launched called People of the World Inscribe the Bible at Canada Christian College, overseen by Dr. Charles McVety. This Inscribe the Bible project is being sponsored by Christians United for Israel, B'nai Brith Canada, and overseen by the government of Israel's Consulate General in Toronto.

Bible lovers all over the world will be invited to make a personal contribution to a Bible manuscript in their own handwriting. The Shrine of the Bible will become a centre of biblical studies, as well as a hub for cultural and educational initiatives which seek to explore the relevance and impact of Bible values on historical and contemporary human affairs. The staff of this new centre will archive, manage and display the hundreds of manuscripts and Bible volumes written in many languages, illustrating the ubiquity of the Bible. The project encompasses both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Bible, the beginning of morality and civilization for Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is the cultural and ethical gift of the Jewish people to the world. Millions around the world identify with the Bible and its reflection on the spiritual life. The faith, history and stories that took place in the Holy Land stir the imagination of hundreds of millions throughout the entire world.

We wish the three sponsoring organizations and their leaders, Dr. Charles McVety, Dr. Frank Dimant and Consul General Amir Gissin, Godspeed as they undertake his most significant project.

CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I rise today to talk about the importance of carbon monoxide detectors. Later today I will be introducing a private member's bill that will make all Ontarians safer by requiring a functioning carbon monoxide detector in all homes.

Carbon monoxide is a lethal gas. It is odourless and colourless, making it undetectable without a carbon monoxide detector. The tragic loss of the Hawkins family by carbon monoxide poisoning has reminded Ontarians how vulnerable we are to this powerful gas.

Richard and Laurie Hawkins and their two children were killed by carbon monoxide due to a blocked ventilation pipe. The bill will be called the Hawkins Gignac Act in honour of this young family. Since the Hawkins family tragedy, two other families, one in Toronto and one in Guelph, have suffered the effects of carbon monoxide poisoning. Luckily in these cases, they survived.

According to the Canada Safety Council, carbon monoxide is the leading cause of fatal poisonings in North America. Carbon monoxide detectors are simple, inexpensive and the only way to protect people in the place where they should feel the safest—in their own homes. I've already received numerous letters of support for this bill, including one from the Owen Sound fire prevention inspector.

In a recent poll on a London radio station, 78% of respondents said that they would be in favour of making carbon monoxide detectors mandatory. I hope that this bill will prevent tragedies, but please, don't wait for it to become law; install a carbon monoxide detector in your home and make sure that you, your friends and your family are safe—and do it today.

1310

GENERATION CHANGE LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

Mr. Mario Sergio: I am privileged today to have in the House Sergeant Steven Hicks from 31 Division in my riding of York West, accompanied by Sergeant Dan Ross. They are here with us today.

Sergeant Hicks is at the helm of the Generation Change leadership initiative. His team's tireless work with youth at risk helps change the image of Jane and Finch through positive student initiatives.

Youths' lives are being changed, directing many to attend colleges and universities, preparing through sports scholarships and Olympic teams in wrestling and soccer as well.

Youth and students are taught and encouraged to do voluntary work, to visit at Sick Kids hospital, and to hand out toys to unwed mothers with newborn babies. Some of these tough kids regularly visit the cancer ward and read books to children.

Thanks to Sergeant Hicks, teenaged girls, where once drugs and prostitution would be their only fate in life, have been saved from violence and living on the street.

Youth are becoming role models, picking up garbage, planting flowers and trees. Students from Emery Collegiate, C. W. Jefferys and Westview, motivated through the Generation Change leadership initiative, are inspiring other youth in spearheading toy drives, volunteering, and joining sporting events for special-needs kids.

I would like to thank and applaud Sergeant Hicks and team for all the efforts, positive change and successes in building a better community and promoting lasting positive relations.

I especially want to thank Sergeant Hicks for his perseverance, compassion, leadership and mostly for his

fathering spirit, which is the key to what our youth are most hungering for and so desperately need.

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. David Zimmer: Usually when we rise to give a member's statement, we do so to honour a constituent, an organization or a cause. Sometimes we recognize contributions of fellow citizens who are working hard to make Ontario a better place.

Today I am honoured to stand and recognize Bill 66, An Act to proclaim Holocaust Memorial Day—Yom ha-Shoah in Ontario.

On this coming December 18, this landmark piece of legislation here in Ontario will see its 10th anniversary. The bill established Ontario as the very first jurisdiction in North America to have an official day on which to commemorate the Holocaust. The day takes place on Yom ha-Shoah, in accordance with the Jewish calendar.

I'm heartened at the spirit by which all Ontarians implemented Holocaust education programs to honour the survivors and to remember those who perished. The importance of these programs goes way beyond historical remembrance. These programs are committed to utilizing examples from the Holocaust to highlight the importance of combating intolerance, racism and, yes, anti-Semitism.

I'm looking forward to attending the fourth annual Dinner of Miracles this evening. This one-of-a-kind event, hosted by the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem and the Azrieli Foundation, brings together 300 Jewish and non-Jewish professionals, and other organizations, from across Ontario to commemorate this event.

On behalf of the close to 13,000 Holocaust survivors in Ontario, I am proud to acknowledge this historic piece of Ontario legislation.

HANUKKAH

Mr. Mike Colle: During this holiday season, in our very diverse province of Ontario, we celebrate a lot of incredibly important traditions. Certainly we all are aware of the Christmas tradition and the tradition of Eid, but there's also a very important tradition of celebrating and rededicating ourselves through the festival of Hanukkah.

Hanukkah's origins go back more than 2,000 years. In fact, it goes back to a time when the Jewish people were under the control of an empire based in Syria. They were ordered to worship Greek gods. Many Jewish people were put to death as a result of their beliefs.

Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the holy temple in Jerusalem after the Jewish victory over the Hellenist Syrians in 165 BCE. With a small amount of oil, the menorah was miraculously lit for eight days in celebration.

Certainly, in my constituency of Eglinton—Lawrence and throughout all of Ontario—in fact, throughout all of the world—it is critically important for us at this time, given what has happened in Mumbai especially, to stop

and reflect that we must respect all traditions. This tradition of Hanukkah is certainly one that I respect and will be celebrating with my friends the Waxbergs, who host a family get-together every Hanukkah. I will be there this year again in remembering this remarkable people and this remarkable period in history—Hanukkah.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HAMILTON HEALTH SCIENCES ELECTIONS ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES ÉLECTIONS AU SEIN DU HAMILTON HEALTH SCIENCES

Ms. Horwath moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 142, An Act to provide for the election of members of the board of trustees of Hamilton Health Sciences / Projet de loi 142, Loi prévoyant l'élection des membres du conseil d'administration du Hamilton Health Sciences.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This bill is simply a democratization of the governance of the health sciences centre in Hamilton. It provides that at least 15 of the trustees on the Hamilton Health Sciences board of trustees are to be elected to represent the 15 wards of the city of Hamilton.

HAWKINS GIGNAC ACT (CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS), 2008

LOI HAWKINS GIGNAC DE 2008 (DÉTECTEURS DE MONOXYDE DE CARBONE)

Mr. Hardeman moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 143, An Act to amend the Building Code Act, 1992 to require carbon monoxide detectors in all residential buildings / Projet de loi 143, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1992 sur le code du bâtiment pour exiger l'installation de détecteurs de monoxyde de carbone dans tous les bâtiments servant à l'habitation.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Recently, the tragic death of a young family in Oxford from carbon monoxide poisoning has reminded us all of the importance of having functioning carbon monoxide detectors in our homes. This legislation that I'm introducing will protect the lives of

Ontarians by requiring that carbon monoxide detectors be installed in all existing homes as well as being hard-wired in new homes.

The short title of the bill is the Hawkins Gignac Act in honour of the family that was lost. Thank you very much for allowing me this opportunity.

PROVINCIAL ADVOCATE
FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH
AMENDMENT ACT, 2008
LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR L'INTERVENANT PROVINCIAL
EN FAVEUR DES ENFANTS
ET DES JEUNES

Ms. Horwath moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 144, An Act to amend the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007 / Projet de loi 144, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur l'intervenant provincial en faveur des enfants et des jeunes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This bill comes in reaction to the troubles that the provincial advocate has had getting documents and information from the government. The Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007, is amended to give the advocate power to require a person to provide any information, document or thing that the advocate considers necessary or advisable in exercising his or her duties.

1320

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

SCHOOL SAFETY
LA SÉCURITÉ DANS LES ÉCOLES

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I rise in the House today to restate our government's commitment to making schools safer.

Ce matin, j'ai reçu le rapport final de l'équipe d'action pour la sécurité dans les écoles. In February, I asked this team of experts to work together again to examine gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour between students in schools. They also looked at reporting requirements and the barriers to reporting these issues, and they participated in a review of local police and school board protocols. The report summarizes their findings, following months of research and consultations and 78 recommendations.

Even one incident of homophobia or sexual assault in our schools is too many. It's very disheartening to hear of

these. Our schools should be places where everyone—staff, students, parents and the community—feels welcome, safe and respected. We know that bullying and harassment can affect students' health, mental well-being and their success at school. Le rapport traite de sujets très sérieux. Nous avons la charge collective d'intervenir, and we will take action.

We will act on the recommendations in the report to help address these issues and make our schools even safer. We will introduce legislation that would, if passed, improve requirements for school staff to report serious incidents at school, including sexual assault, to the principal. The report also recommends other areas for action that will guide us, including: working with education partners to revise the curriculum to ensure gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour are discussed in the classroom; the development of a manual to help staff respond to incidents of sexual assault; and the expansion of the school climate surveys to help schools assess perceptions of safety.

We take these findings very seriously. The report's recommendations will help guide our further actions to help make our schools even safer and help put a stop to this type of behaviour in schools.

J'aimerais remercier les membres de l'équipe d'action pour la sécurité dans les écoles pour leur travail assidu et leur engagement continu envers l'amélioration de la sécurité dans nos écoles. My colleagues Liz Sandals, who chaired the team, and Leeanna Pendergast worked closely with fellow team members—

Applause.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Yes, yes that's right; wonderful parliamentary assistants, both.

Stu Auty was also on the team, Dr. Inez Elliston, Ray Hughes, Dr. Debra Pepler and Lynn Ziraldo, all people with great experience and knowledge. The team's previous reports have been evidence of their diligence and dedication, and this report is no exception. I'm confident that by building on our safe school strategy and taking action on these recommendations, we can make schools even safer.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I really appreciate the opportunity to respond to the minister. I'm encouraged by the kind of work that the safe schools committee has done, and I want to thank the member from Guelph for the encouragement and inspiration that you've given to those folks.

Just as in any report, it's necessary to read the details. I'm encouraged by the things I heard at the press conference this morning, but I do want to take the time to read the details before I make any firm statements.

One thing I do know is that our environment has changed so much in the last 20 years, and it's regrettable that we even need a report like this. But we do, and I'm glad that it's finally here.

My one concern is, what happens to the kids who have already been victimized, who are perpetrators and who have not been helped? Is there an ability through this process to go back and look at those kids? Because they are there, and they were lost in the system until this report came forward. It's my hope that with the recommendations in this report, those kids will now be captured or those kinds of situations will now be captured and those kids will be helped.

Kids are so vulnerable. They are either afraid to speak up or they're protecting a buddy. That's just the nature of the world a child lives in. I would hope that we, as adults, can give them the kind of leadership to show them that it's okay to speak out about things that have very deep meaning to them, that are troubling them, that are making them afraid. If they can't get a response that says, "It's okay, we understand, we're going to look into it and we will bring you help," then the message gets sent out to other children that there really is no point in talking about the things that trouble you, especially when it comes to bullying—and now, even sexual assault in public schools, never mind in high schools.

I hope that through the recommendations in the report, we can go a little bit further and look at the kids who have already reported incidents we have not taken up and not been able to help. I hope there is an opportunity for all parties to work together in progressing the goals in this report, because this report and the issue it discusses really cross all political boundaries. It has no boundaries; this is about all of our kids.

It is my hope that we can stay in touch, not only with schools and educators but also with parents. I think it's one of those issues we really need to work on together. Nobody has cornered the market on all the good ideas for something like this. So I'm just offering my willingness, from the Progressive Conservative Party, to work in co-operation to make sure we get this right, that we can protect as many kids as possible, right from the beginning, and that we can work together on something like this.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mr. Rosario Marchese: New Democrats welcome this report as well and thank the group for putting this together.

This report obviously deals with verbal harassment against girls and sexual abuse against young women in our high schools, and with homophobic slurs as well. This is a serious subject, and yes, it's true that it's not easy to deal with.

They talked about some highlights of this report, and I have to admit that, yes, you need curriculum changes. But there was no talk about timelines. No one on the committee, nor the minister, talked about how long these curriculum changes will take. They do take time. I personally would like to have a sense of what that might be. Is it one year, two years, three years or four?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's under review now.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Okay, it's under review. It would have been nice to have timelines connected to this, because when we're talking about a subject as serious as this, we should have had that in advance rather than saying, "We're looking at it."

They also talked about working in partnership with agencies. The agencies I know, which must be the same agencies my friends know as well, are overworked, understaffed and seriously underpaid—they've been underpaid for 15 long years—and many of these people are part-time doing full-time work. So good luck to you, Minister and parliamentary assistant, as you reach out to your partners in government agencies to help with this very serious subject.

The highlights also talked about doing more data collection. I have to admit that I get tired of more data collection. We have a sense of the seriousness of the problem; I'm not sure how much more data will reveal to us. But we are going to do more data collection. God bless. I'm not a big fan of that.

1330

Yes, they talked about reporting and closing the gap in reporting—at least making things clear, and there will be legislation in terms of reporting mechanisms. Okay. But it doesn't inspire me, I have to admit, in terms of things that we could be doing rather quickly. For me, the thing we should be doing is hiring youth workers. The minister in the press conference talked about how difficult it was for her to talk to her young children, now adults, on certain matters, matters that—

Mrs. Liz Sandals: All of us.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Of course. I was about to say, "It's not just you; it's many." So we have a difficult time. A lot of these young people are not going to talk to their teachers and they're not going to talk to their parents. Who are they going to talk to? They have spoken to the youth workers that the Toronto board used to have. These are the people that gays and lesbians used to go to on a regular basis. Young men and women in trouble would go to them because they were the figures who had their respect and with whom they could share their intimate problems. We should be hiring them immediately. Social workers are people they would go to to speak to. They might argue, "Oh, we've hired some" or "lots"; I'm not sure. We need them back in the system.

I would say: Look, we keep going to the teacher to solve all of the problems we have with young kids. I don't know if you've noticed, but every time there's a problem we say, "The teacher should know this. It's common sense." The poor teacher has to be a policeman or -woman, has to be a psychologist, has to be a social worker, has to be a mother or father, a disciplinarian. Good God. We want teachers to do everything, every time there's a problem. They can't do it all. So I say, we need to go to the principal—and make sure that there's serious training for the principals. Maybe it's in this report; I didn't read it yet because it was just given to us. But we need principals to be the principal teachers of this particular issue and make sure we work with the school as best we can.

Finally, I say to you, Minister: You've got a big job. It's a ministerial responsibility and a government responsibility to make sure that the ads get out there and the education gets out there in a public way. If this is a big, serious issue and we want parents and everyone to be involved, we need government education and government ads. You should be spending a couple of bucks to deal with this, and not hope that the teachers are going to do this on their own on a topic as serious as this.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital is fully utilized; and

"Whereas Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital was sized to serve a town of Oakville population of 130,000, and the current population is now" over "170,000; and

"Whereas the population of Oakville continues to grow as mandated by 'Places to Grow,' an act of the Ontario Legislature, and is projected to be 187,500" people "in 2012, the completion date for a new facility in the original time frame; and

"Whereas residents of the town of Oakville are entitled to the same quality of health care as all Ontarians; and

"Whereas hospital facilities in the surrounding area do not have capacity to absorb Oakville's overflow needs;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure the new Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital be completed under its original timelines without further delay."

I agree with this petition, I sign my name and I pass it to my page, Amanda.

HOSPICES

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas hospices on church or hospital property do not pay taxes;

"Whereas hospices are not-for-profit organizations providing emotional, spiritual and bereavement support and respite care to terminally ill individuals and their family members;

"Whereas a residential hospice (usually an eight- to 10-bed home-like facility) provides around-the-clock care to terminally ill individuals and support to their families;

"Whereas hospice services are provided free of charge;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow hospices across the province to be exempt from municipal taxes."

I agree with this petition. I will send it with page Bradyn.

REGISTERED DISABILITY SAVINGS PLANS

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the 2007 federal budget introduced the registered disability savings plan ... to enable parents and grandparents with a disabled child to save for their future; and

"Whereas, in order for RDSPs to work for families, the Ontario government needs to introduce changes to ensure families who put money away in an RDSP are not penalized by having the savings considered an asset when calculating other provincial assistance programs like the Ontario disability support plan ... ; and

"Whereas annual RDSP contributions will attract Canada Disability Savings Grants, depending on a family's income and amount contributed, to a maximum of \$70,000;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately adopt Bill 94 and provide families with the tools to make necessary investments in their child's long-term financial security."

I obviously support this petition since it's my own and will be pleased to give it to my page from Dufferin-Caledon, Jacqueline.

UNIVERSITY LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I have a petition from hundreds and hundreds of people. It's a very thick pile, as you can see.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas back-to-work legislation would interfere with the collective bargaining process at York University between the employer and CUPE 3903; and

"Whereas such legislation would set a precedent for future collective bargaining in the university sector at a precarious time; and

"Whereas universities are autonomous institutions within the provincial framework;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Reject back-to-work legislation and do not interfere with the collective bargaining process or force York University CUPE members back to work."

I support this petition.

LUPUS

Mr. Kuldip Kular: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no new safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

I agree with the petitioners, so I put my signature on it as well.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: First of all, I want to praise the work of some folks in the Weston Community Coalition, who have collected more than a thousand signatures for the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"The government of Ontario promised that alternative routes would be studied for the air-rail link. That same government has now proposed that no alternatives need be studied. If the responsible authority (GO Transit, Metrolinx or other) chooses Weston as the route;

"We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens who urge our leaders to act now to ensure:

"That the air-rail link be public transit with fares in keeping with current public transit options;

"That the air-rail link be below grade throughout Weston, to avoid closing any streets, including John Street and Denison Avenue East;

"That the air-rail link include stops at appropriate places along the route, to serve the communities it passes, including Weston; and

"That the air-rail link be electric."

I support this petition and I give it to page Amanda.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I rise on behalf of the Weston Community Coalition, whose dedicated members have managed, in just a couple of weeks, to collect the support of more than a thousand local residents and Toronto city councillors, including my own, Gord Perks, for the following petition.

"The government of Ontario promised that alternative routes would be studied for the air-rail link. That same

government has now proposed that no alternatives need be studied. If the responsible authority (GO Transit, Metrolinx or other) chooses Weston as the route;

"We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens who urge our leaders to act now to ensure:

"That the air-rail link be public transit with fares in keeping with current public transit options;

"That the air-rail link be below grade throughout Weston, to avoid closing any streets, including John Street and Denison Avenue East;

"That the air-rail link include stops at appropriate places along the route, to serve the communities it passes, including Weston; and

"That the air-rail link be electric."

I agree with this petition, Mr. Speaker, and I'm going to give it to Bradyn to present to you. I'm going to also affix my signature.

1340

LUPUS

Mr. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, I would like to wish you a merry Christmas, and the Clerk and the table officers all the best of the season.

I have a petition today from the Lupus Foundation of Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no new safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

I agree with this petition, will affix my signature to it, and give it to page Sarah.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I have a petition from the Balsam Hill-Horton North Women's Institute.

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services, Madeleine Meilleur, has decided that grandparents caring for their grandchildren no longer qualify for temporary care assistance; and

"Whereas the removal of the temporary care assistance could mean that children will be forced into foster care; and

"Whereas the temporary care assistance amounted to \$231 per month, much less than a foster family would receive to look after the same children if they were forced into foster care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately reverse the decision to remove temporary care assistance for grandparents looking after their grandchildren."

I support this petition and will give it to page Bradyn.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents.

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act as above to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I shall affix my signature and send it to the clerks' table.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly from the good people of Milton.

"Whereas Milton District Hospital was designed to serve a population of 30,000 and the town of Milton is now home to more than 69,000 people and is still growing rapidly; and

"Whereas the town of Milton is the fastest-growing town in Canada and was forced into that rate of growth

by an act of the Ontario Legislature called 'Places to Grow'; and

"Whereas the town of Milton is projected to have a population of 101,600 people in 2014, which is the earliest date an expansion could be completed; and

"Whereas the current Milton facility is too small to accommodate Milton's explosive growth and parts of the hospital prohibit the integration of new outpatient clinics and diagnostic technologies;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure timely approval and construction of the expansion to Milton District Hospital."

I'm pleased to put my signature on this petition and pass it to my page, Amanda.

TOM LONGBOAT

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition here to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario.

"Whereas Tom Longboat, a proud son of the Onondaga Nation, was one of the most internationally celebrated athletes in Canadian history;

"Whereas Tom Longboat was voted as the number one Canadian athlete of the 20th century by Maclean's magazine for his record-breaking marathon and long-distance triumphs against the world's best;

"Whereas Tom Longboat fought for his country in World War I and was wounded twice during his tour of duty;

"Whereas Tom Longboat is a proud symbol of the outstanding achievements and contributions of Canada's aboriginal people;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario."

I support this petition and I affix my name to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It is signed by people from all over Mississauga, Burlington, Oakville and Etobicoke. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to ‘day surgery’ procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed.”

I’m pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Samiha to carry it for me.

BEER RETAILING AND DISTRIBUTION

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: “Whereas the current system, practice and arrangement of retailing and distributing beer in the province of Ontario—and more specifically, the ‘near monopoly’ of The Beer Store—severely restricts the accessibility, convenience and choice for retail consumers of beer in Ontario; and

“Whereas The Beer Store ‘near monopoly’ is controlled by ‘for-profit, foreign-owned companies’ and these companies are not accountable to the people of Ontario, and these companies do not act in the best interests of the people of Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That legislation be introduced that will permit the retailing and distribution of beer through alternative and additional grocery and supermarket retail channels that will fairly compete with The Beer Store, thereby allowing an accessible, convenient, safe, well-regulated and environmentally responsible retailing environment for beer to become established in the province of Ontario.”

I pass this to our page Amanda.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

LIQUOR LICENCE AMENDMENT ACT (FRUIT WINE), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES PERMIS D’ALCOOL (VIN DE FRUITS)

Mr. Runciman moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 132, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act /
Projet de loi 132, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les permis
d’alcool.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I appreciate this opportunity. This is an issue that affects a business in my riding, but it has broader implications across the province. Certainly when we’re looking at the challenges facing the agricultural sector and facing our economy

more generally, this is a relatively modest initiative but one that can have a positive impact on helping many in the farming community, and others as well in terms of farmers’ markets. We’ve seen in some areas where farmers’ markets have declined in terms of the number of individuals participating and their ability to attract not only local consumers but people from surrounding areas, and perhaps more importantly, tourists.

This is an initiative—and I’ve narrowed it down. I know there have been a variety of proposals over the years which are broader in scope in terms of dealing with cider and with Ontario VQA wines. I have tried to make this as attractive as possible in terms of hoping that I will gain support from all sides of the House. Certainly the early indications are that that will indeed be the case. I know the current Minister of Agriculture, Ms. Dombrowsky, on a number of occasions has indicated her personal support for this kind of initiative.

1350

In my own riding of Leeds–Grenville, the fruit wine producer—and I have only one at this point in time—is Countryman’s Estate Winery, which is near Maynard, just northeast of Brockville. It’s operated by Gene and Marsha Countryman, salt-of-the earth people who are very enthused about this new business. They actually entered into the business only two years ago, in 2006, but it continues to be a struggle because of the limited retail opportunities available for the company and other limitations as well.

I want to be complimentary to the LCBO. They have, in my view, been very co-operative and very helpful. The Countryman’s products are now in something like 20 LCBO outlets in eastern Ontario. So I think that they have been making the effort to assist and see this relatively new industry grow and prosper.

There are problems, obviously, in terms of the margins at the LCBO, the taxation rates and so on. My colleague Mr. Hillier will be speaking in more detail to that in a few moments. The margins and the volumes out of the LCBO outlets are modest, to say the least. I know that Countryman’s sells more in a week out of their retail operation on-site than the LCBO would sell in a month. But, again, that’s an issue of marketing, where perhaps the government could play an increased role. That’s not an issue today, but that’s an aspect in terms of making more and more people aware of the products and encouraging them to sample the product and give feedback to the producers.

My legislation is modelled on the Nova Scotia legislation, but in reality the sale of fruit wines is something that’s occurring in a whole range of jurisdictions, not just Nova Scotia—New Brunswick, Quebec, New York state, Ohio, Iowa, New Jersey, just to name a few. I had a note here from New York state. They have an annual wine-tasting permit, and you can do tastings and sales at farmers’ markets, as long as that farmers’ market is a not-for-profit market. The producers register with the Department of Agriculture, and the permit is \$61 a year. So that’s just one ingredient, if you will.

I want to mention the supporters again—and I'll go over some of their notes here.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture just recently came out very strongly with giving their support for this initiative. Obviously, Farmers' Markets Ontario believes strongly in this as well.

The farmers' markets organization, in a letter dated October 7 of this year, indicated: "One of our FMO goals is to have fruit wines produced by small Ontario producers sold at farmers' markets. Our farmers need all the help we can provide."

In an earlier letter sent to Premier McGuinty from the same association, talking about the potential for farmers' markets, they stated: "We believe that Ontario's farmers' markets should act as business incubators and direct outlets for the best our communities have to offer—local farmers and producers bringing their fruits, vegetables, meat, eggs, fish, dairy products, preserves, baked goods, etc.... We hope to see Ontario fruit wine producers selling their wine at Ontario farmers' markets."

From the government ranks, the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Mrs. Van Bommel, has been very strongly supportive of this initiative, and is on the record doing so. I want to quote Mrs. Van Bommel, because this is certainly a view that I support. She's talking about this proposal, saying, "The idea falls into line with OMAFRA's commitment to encourage rural economic development and promote innovative and unique branding and marketing opportunities for producers in the province." That's an excellent observation with respect to this initiative.

I have another letter here from Carl Kimmett, who's the president of the Central Ontario Viniculture Association. Mr. Kimmett is focusing primarily on the central Ontario area and talking about this being a showcase opportunity for farm producers: "Each local farmers' market provides a point of sale for economic return to the producer and in addition is a valued tourism showcase for the region. We know that all businesses benefit from the tourist dollars spent within each ... Ontario community."

In referencing the economic benefit, I wanted to comment on a study that was done by KPMHG recently—do I have that right?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: KPMG.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Okay. Let's get it straight. KPMG—and took a look at the economic implications. I'll put some of this on the record as well:

"The return to the Ontario economy for one litre of wine from France, Italy, South Africa, Chile, Australia etc. is considered to be \$0.67. The return to the Ontario economy for a litre of Ontario VQA wine is considered to be \$11.50. That is over 17 times the return to the Ontario economy per litre. The return to the economy of fruit wines is even greater as the fruit is more expensive."

Obviously, there is a significant economic potential and positive economic spinoff for the province by allowing and encouraging greater sales of this product produced in the province of Ontario.

To get back to some of the other people who are on the record in support of this initiative—and I've quoted

Mrs. Van Bommel on the farmers' markets—we also have the member from Oakville, Mr. Flynn, who has written to the minister indicating his pursuit of this issue and his encouragement that this initiative go forward: "I feel that this is an issue that needs to be given proper attention and I support their initiative as this is important to our community." That's the member from Oakville.

Another organization, the Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association, and Cathy Bartolic, who is the executive administrator—this is a letter to Minister Phillips indicating their support for the proposal put forward to allow the sale of wine at farmers' markets. That's the Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association.

The Ontario Berry Growers Association—another letter of support. They are indicating—this is signed by Lee Etherington, who's the president of that particular association—their strong support.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Great guy.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Mr. Leal, the member from Peterborough, knows the gentleman, and perhaps he'll speak to that a little later on. He is strongly supporting "the initiative"—in his association—"to sell Ontario wines at farmers' markets."

"For those growers who have already invested in this value-added process, this is a great opportunity to enhance and improve this developing industry. Ontario berry growers are always looking at alternative ways of marketing locally produced fruit and this would help expand the fruit wine industry."

"This initiative will not only benefit those involved in the production of fruit and grape wines but will also enhance the farmers' markets where they are sold."

The final endorsement, if you will, that I'll put on the record is from the Minister of Agriculture herself. In a letter to Bert Andrews, who's from Andrews' Scenic Acres—

Interjection: He's here.

1400

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I gather he's here today in the gallery. Welcome, Mr. Andrews.

This is a letter to Mr. Andrews, of Andrews' Scenic Acres, indicating that the minister is very much supportive of the Fruit Wines of Ontario proposal. She says: "I will continue to voice my support for this idea with my cabinet colleagues and the potential it has to enhance business opportunities for small wineries, farmers' markets and rural companies."

I look forward to additional comments from other members.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: As the member from Leeds—Grenville said, his bill will allow manufacturers of fruit wine to sell fruit wine at farmers' markets. Frankly—and this is unusual for me—I applaud the member from Leeds—Grenville for his advocacy.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You always do.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: No, no. We disagree. But when he comes forward promoting Ontario products, reducing the

amount of goods that are transported from outside the province, putting people to work—all the good things that I think need to be recognized—then I have to say, “Member from Leeds–Grenville, I’m glad you’re advocating for Ontario’s fruit wines.”

As he has said, there are fruit wine growers across the province. In Winona, Puddicombe Estate Winery’s peach fruit wine—those of you who have enjoyed it will know it is a good product; this is not a commercial plug—in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Southbrook winery’s blueberry fruit wine, and Countryman’s Estate strawberry icewine, which Mr. Runciman was talking about. There are very high-quality products being made in this province; no question about it. And the more that is made in this province and the less that is imported, the better for the environment and for our economy.

I mentioned products by name because sometimes when you talk about products in a very general, abstract way, you don’t get a sense of the individual contribution to our economy as a whole. I agree with the member that we need to be encouraging not just Ontarians but anyone in North America who is interested, but certainly Ontarians, to buy VQA wines made with Ontario grapes or other fruits, especially as we get into the holiday season.

Having talked about the jobs, supporting communities and also this being a green choice, I have to also agree there is a concern that there should be a lot more exposure for Ontario wines and Ontario fruit wines in this province. The small wineries get on the LCBO shelves but often are not noticed in the way they should be. I was surprised by the quote from the member from Leeds–Grenville saying that Countryman’s Estate Winery sold more out of its own operation than is sold out of LCBO outlets. In fact, our products should be featured and marketed prominently.

The LCBO is one of the largest single purchasers of wine, spirits and alcohol, and it’s good at what it does. Frankly, it has become an awful lot more innovative in the last few years than it was in the past, and I think that people see it that way. When I talk to neighbours or friends, they see the LCBO as well run, providing a good service, a place they can depend on and, frankly, that is open extraordinarily long hours—very long hours.

When you look at customer satisfaction surveys, eight out of 10 customers support the LCBO and are satisfied with the service. Less than 1% say they’re not satisfied with the LCBO.

Having given all the positives, I have to say what my concerns are.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Ooh.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Now, now, member not sitting in your chair, restrain yourself.

Laughter.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I wanted to see what Rosario’s felt like.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, I’m glad you’re venturing around the chamber, seeing what it’s like from different vantages.

Interjection: It’s not as good as over here.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It’s not as good as over there? It’s a good seat.

I am concerned about initiatives that take responsibilities away from the LCBO, and certainly concerned that what has been brought forward as a very positive initiative to promote the sale of Ontario fruit wines could also be seen as an opening to further privatize the sale of spirits, wine and liquor in this province, and I have great concern with that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: There’s the bugaboo.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: That’s what I have great concern with, because I think privatization is a problem in terms of the revenue that comes in to this government. Certainly everyone in this House is well aware of the constraints we face in terms of revenue.

I have tremendous confidence that the LCBO will consistently and responsibly enforce the laws around the sale of liquor to minors. I cast no aspersions on those who would sell at farmers’ markets, but the bigger the private sector becomes, the more there’s a chance you will have operators who will not be as responsible, who may be pressed financially, who may decide, “Well, what the heck. I’ll just sell to these people one time, even though they’re clearly not of age.” I’m concerned that even though there are good features in what is being brought forward by the member from Leeds–Grenville—certainly the promotion of Ontario agricultural products is a worthy objective—I’m very concerned about going down the road of privatization.

There are now 200 agency or private stores selling liquor in Ontario, and the number doubled from 86 to 199 between 1996 and 2006. Again, I think we have done well in this province with the crown agency, the LCBO. It has brought in revenue, it has functioned well and it’s serving the public well. To move in this way undermines that agency, which I think we should be supporting and maintaining in public hands. When we have debates on this floor about the well-being of the Ontario government revenue picture, no one advocates reducing our revenue. We need the revenue, and frankly, we’re going to face some stormy waters in the next few years and we may well see much less revenue. So I can’t support efforts that would reduce the scope of the LCBO and reduce the revenue coming in to this jurisdiction.

We need to go to the LCBO and make sure they have a very clear mandate to put more emphasis on small Ontario wineries. We should be using their expertise, their leverage, their market reach to further promote the sale of Ontario products. That would be extraordinarily useful in Ontario, and would allow us not to get into this whole grey area of privatization but, clearly within public hands, promote products made in this province by people who deserve to be supported.

In the past we’ve suggested that the LCBO set up Ontario VQA wine booths: smaller retail outlets, especially in areas with significant tourism. That was a good proposal. It’s still a good proposal. Along the same lines, it might make sense for the LCBO to set up small booths to sell local fruit wines at farmers’ markets, so that Mr.

Runciman's goal would be achieved—the availability of those wines at farmers' markets—and the concerns of others around privatization and socially responsible sale of alcohol are met at the same time. I have no argument with the idea that we should be promoting Ontario products, and I would say that would be the perspective around this House.

Let's have the LCBO come in. Let's have the government sit down with them, point out to them the advantage of growing the domestic product, and quite clearly tell them, "We want you to put an emphasis here. You need to be educating people about the multitude of advantages to buying Ontario, to buying local products," and move from there. So let's have the LCBO take his idea forward.

We don't support privatization, so we won't be supporting the bill. But we would be very open to a discussion on leveraging the LCBO's business, its marketing approach and its knowledge to better develop an Ontario wine industry. It might make sense if there was an all-party review or committee that could take a closer look at it. I hope the member from Leeds–Grenville will continue moving forward with the idea, and I hope he will modify it so that he can get a consensus around this chamber that would support expanding our domestic industry.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Just to add to what was said by the member for Toronto–Danforth—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Sorry, you're not recognized by the Chair. We're going in rotation. The honourable member for Northumberland–Quinte West.

1410

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to have a few minutes to speak about Bill 132, the bill of the member for Leeds–Grenville, Mr. Runciman. I must say I'm also probably privileged because it might be the last time I refer to the member from Leeds–Grenville. If we look, it might be called by some other prefix. Anyway, it's a pleasure to be here today.

Let me just say up front that I personally will be supporting this bill because I think it's very important that, as we move forward in these challenging times, truly world-challenging times, the agricultural industry move at the same pace as other industries. It's probably no news to you or to any member of this House that the good farmers of Ontario have had sort of a repeating of what they've done best in the past: plant the seed, grow the seed and harvest the seed. But as we move forward, those things are not as stable anymore. I'm delighted to see that some of them are looking to the niche markets where we can make some inroads. Certainly what the member from Leeds–Grenville has brought forward makes a lot of sense to support.

I going to probably be repeating some of the things that the member has already mentioned, but they're worth repeating. Obviously, the fruit and wines of On-

tario—I've personally been lobbied both as the member of Northumberland–Quinte West but also in my role as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. We know the good folks of Farmers' Markets Ontario, and I must say my good friend Bob Chorney, the president or chair—I'm not sure what his title is—has been a very good neighbour of mine for a number of years. He has been, in my years, on a number of occasions, trying to tell us that this is the right direction to go. It's always good to hear about those things that are happening in the ground. I know the good work that Farmers' Markets Ontario has done by the way they have grown over a number of years. I'm going to be talking about farmers' markets a little bit as well later on. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture has also endorsed the initiative to better market fruit wines to make them more available.

Just one little bit of caution: As I said, although I'm going to be supporting it, I look forward to going to committee to try to talk about some of the different issues, but I think at the end of the line we need to find a balance between renewed opportunities and social responsibilities. I know that the good people of Ontario take social responsibility very, very seriously. I am hopeful that the bill passes today, is able to be referred to committee, and that we have those discussions to fine-tune it. Whether it's in the pilot project—as you know, the minister has advocated a number of times that it's something she'd certainly like to see, so that we can move forward and basically see what happens. We don't want to pre-determine.

Although some folks haven't heard about this industry, and it's typically not a big industry, in 2007—we know roughly from the records we have that there have been about 20 of these particular industries across the province of Ontario. They have sold in excess of 200,000 litres of fruit wine and about \$3 million worth of business between 2007-08. So, although in the big scheme of things it's a small industry, big things start small, and if they're managed right, they will grow into bigger issues.

Here are just a couple of the reasons why I'm supportive of this in the general sense. It goes along the lines that we as a government, for the last four or five years, have been able to nurture this province of Ontario with the investments that we have made. I think this really fits into the mix. The fact that we'll be investing some \$56 million over the next four years to promote locally grown, locally produced—and how more appropriate is it that this will fit into that equation?

I can tell you, in my own riding, Northumberland–Quinte West, I do visit, maybe not often enough, those farmers' markets or those fruit stands. I can tell you that Buy Ontario, buy local, is really catching on.

I guess to me what's more interesting—I'll just relate a story to you—three years ago, a No Frills store in my riding, my hometown, was selling California fresh corn in season when there was a field less than a kilometre away. This year, that No Frills carried Ontario corn.

I wish the member success. I know I look forward to helping him drive this piece of legislation, with all those

things that may need to be adjusted to make sure that we keep the social fabric that we as Ontarians believe we should keep, but also to give a helping hand to that industry that really needs to be nurtured and needs the help.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I want to congratulate my colleague from Leeds–Grenville for introducing this bill. I also want to congratulate the members on the opposite side who are supportive of this bill. I think this is a significant and unique piece of legislation for rural Ontario and our economy in rural Ontario.

Just to follow up on some of the comments that I've heard about the small size of Ontario's fruit wine industry, it is small, but a number of years ago, Ontario's wine industry was very small as well. It would have remained small without Ontario removing some of those restrictions to its market. That's indeed what this bill starts doing as well for Ontario's fruit wines. It starts removing the obstacles and the obstructions, to allow this infant industry to grow and grow.

We all know that rural Ontario's economy is facing difficulties, facing hurdles and facing troubles. We in this House have an obligation to do what we can to improve that environment. I'm hoping that this bill does get approved, and when it goes to committee, we have to look at a few of the other things that are preventing Ontario's fruit wine industry from being significant and prosperous.

One of them is the cost of doing business with the LCBO. We've recognized this with VQA and have removed these hurdles. But right now, for Ontario fruit wineries, for direct sales, they have to pay 58% of the gross revenues to the LCBO. This is the same margin that they have to pay for fruit wines that are sold within the LCBO.

I think we can all recognize—just imagine, 58% of your gross revenue has to be turned over to an agency which is really doing very little in this regard. One might be able to justify a 58% margin for the LCBO on the retail shelves, but it cannot be justified on the direct sale. So I would really like to see in the committee that we look at ways to eliminate, or at least significantly reduce, that margin payment to the LCBO on direct sale.

Also, further to the comments of the member from Toronto–Danforth, who talked about the LCBO promoting Ontario fruit wines, there are significant delays. Right now, it's typically six months to a year for an Ontario fruit wine to make it through the hurdles to get onto the LCBO shelves, or to be recognized as a product that is legitimate and can be sold directly to restaurants and farmers' markets if this bill gets passed.

I'm really proud to support this bill. I'm very appreciative, and I know many others are appreciative of the member from Leeds–Grenville for bringing this bill forward. I also want to extend a thank you to Bert Andrews for being here today as well. I know there are many others who would like to be here from Ontario's fruit wine industry.

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Let's hope that we will take down these obstacles and allow these niche markets throughout rural Ontario—not just fruit wines, but increase these niche markets and add more value to rural Ontario and more value to Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Just to add to my esteemed colleague from Toronto–Danforth, a few points that he didn't have time to get to.

Number one, I want to point out that certainly the LCBO in Ontario is an incredibly popular institution. Not only is it a money-maker for the folk of Ontario, but eight out of 10 Ontarians appreciate the fact that we do, as a community, own the LCBO. Importantly, extremely importantly, it's a source of good jobs. When we've lost over 250,000 good jobs in the province of Ontario, it's nice to know that, at least in this one sector of the retail market, you can be paid a living wage to work in a retail store, and that's the LCBO.

In fact, just yesterday, on the international day for human rights, OPSEU started a campaign that is very much in keeping with my own campaign for employment standards, equal pay for equal work. So I want to give the nod to OPSEU and that incredible campaign that will be ongoing. As you go to the LCBO before the holiday season or during the holiday season and you see them, you will know that they are fighting for equal pay for equal work; that is, if you're doing the same job, whether part-time or temporary or contract, you should be paid the same amount of money, on an hourly basis, as those doing a full-time job. This is what the United Nations is calling for, after all, and we are in breach of that human right in Ontario—and in Canada, I might point out. Not only are they fighting for everybody's right to equal pay for equal work, but they are also doing their own campaign. So let them know how much you appreciate them in this busy season.

Unfortunately, we will not be able to support this, despite the fact that we in the New Democratic Party, I think to a person, all really enjoy and love fruit wine and will, I'm sure, be imbibing some of it over the holidays. We would like to see the LCBO have a hand in that so that these jobs continue to be good jobs wherever they are, whether they're by a country road or in the centre of an urban setting, and that the kiosks selling and promoting hopefully what is grown and made in Ontario, our wines, are handled by employees who have the dignity of organized labour, the dignity of a union job. We've seen far too many of those jobs taken away in the last five years under the McGuinty government and seen far too many of those jobs taken away over the last 10 years or so from the LCBO itself in the ongoing privatization by stealth.

So, unfortunately, to the member from Leeds–Grenville, we won't be supporting this, but we do appreciate the concern and we will continue to drink fruit wine.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I want to say at the outset that I'll be supporting Bill 132, a bill whose time has clearly come. The member from Leeds–Grenville talked about a small community in his riding, and I want to say, just for the record, that about 14 months ago I had the opportunity to be in another small community in his riding, the community of Athens. I want to thank them for the very warm reception that I had that day in the local community hall. I really appreciated the sort of east-central Ontario, United Empire Loyalist work ethic and their contribution to our province.

This is a very important bill from a wide variety of perspectives. My colleague from Northumberland–Quinte West talked about his good friend Bob Chorney. I subscribe to the Eastern Ontario Farmers Forum, which I think is a very good bible to know what is going on in rural eastern Ontario, and it quotes Mr. Chorney in an article; he's from Brighton, Mr. Rinaldi's neighbour. "There are about 145 farmers' markets in the province of Ontario, he said. 'In Ontario, market sales are growing 5% a year. It's a growth industry,'" and he puts it in the perspective of some dollar figures. "Sales from Ontario farmers' markets now exceed \$700 million annually, with an economic impact of some \$2 billion.... 'We have over one million regular shoppers,'" who go to farmers' markets.

I know in my own case, I buy eggs every Saturday morning at the Peterborough farmers' market from my good friend Joyce Miller, who has an egg operation in beautiful Keene, Ontario...

Mr. Runciman also mentioned Lee Etherington. I know Lee very well. His neighbour is the McLean Berry Farm, which has developed what they call an everbearing strawberry, available at the end of August, in September and, indeed, October.

I do have a fruit winery in the riding of Peterborough—actually, I share it with the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock—Mr. John Rufa, who operates Kawartha winery in beautiful Buckhorn, Ontario. John is a very interesting individual. He had a very distinguished career as a teacher in the GTA. He wanted to retire to another community, and he chose our area of the province. One of the things that he established was the Kawartha winery, which is a very successful operation. He is looking for an opportunity to sell his product on a wider basis, and the bill that has been brought forward by my colleague from Leeds–Grenville this afternoon will certainly be very, very helpful in that area.

I'm also pleased that the vice-president of the Ontario Viniculture Association, Larry Paterson, happens to be from Peterborough. Mr. Paterson had a very distinguished career with the LCBO in the Peterborough area. He was a manager of several retail operations. Post-retirement, he has taken a real interest in promoting wines that are produced from other fruits in the province of Ontario. I had a chance to chat with him this morning. I indicated that I would be speaking this afternoon in support of the bill from my colleague from Leeds–Grenville, and he indicated to me that as of June 2008,

about 50 operators have joined the Ontario Viniculture Association. They've put together a very important industry umbrella group to further their objectives, in order to have the opportunity to showcase their products on a wider basis within the organizational structure of the LCBO and indeed through farmers' markets. In fact, the vice-president comes from Peterborough, and the treasurer, Dr. Liang Liu, also comes from Peterborough. So there's a real interest in this issue—and I should mention Carl Kimmett. He resides in Lindsay, Ontario. So this has been a very, very important topic in our area.

Mr. Paterson, as a former employee of the LCBO, was certainly a great promoter of VQA. He's looking for a way for us to put a special designation on fruit wines in the province of Ontario—product that would perhaps bear the Foodland Ontario label—so that the consumer will know exactly the kind of quality product they may be purchasing through the operation of farmers' markets in the province of Ontario. It may be that we will put another special designation on these products, such as "country wine." So, again, the consumer will know exactly the kind of high-quality product that they may be purchasing.

This is a wonderful way to extend sales in the province of Ontario and to generate revenue for our agricultural community, which has gone through a number of challenges over the last few years. I really applaud the member from Leeds–Grenville for bringing this bill forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased today to rise to speak in support of Bill 132. The sale of fruit wine in farmers' markets across Ontario would be a welcome addition to these markets and would proudly display one of the many homegrown goods Ontario has to offer. I frequent the farmers' markets in my riding of Dufferin–Caledon and consider this a worthwhile proposal.

Farmers' markets are known for selling locally grown, fresh produce. Farmers' markets are where communities come together to meet, mingle and exchange stories. People of all ages come to inspect the local goods and buy direct from the grower. For many families, my own included, visiting a farmers' market is a Saturday morning tradition.

Shopping at farmers' markets supports a centuries-old way of life, the family farm. They represent hard-working family operations across Ontario and preserve an important part of Ontario's heritage.

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Shopping at a farmers' market is great for the economy of the community as well. For every dollar spent at the market, another two dollars ripple through the provincial economy. In Ontario alone, sales at farmers' markets total almost \$600 million, leading to an economic impact of \$1.8 billion. Allowing fruit wines to be sold in Ontario farmers' markets would be a new business opportunity for small wineries in communities across the province. Not only would this stimulate the sustainability and growth of small businesses in Ontario, but the

attraction of wine sales would increase traffic at farmers' markets.

One hundred per cent of the fruit used to produce fruit wines must be grown in Ontario. Being able to sell their Ontario wines at the farmers' market will give these producers another opportunity to market their goods. Selling wines in farmers' markets across Ontario would give small business owners the advantage they need in these challenging economic times.

While selling their wine through the LCBO is great publicity and access to Ontario fruit wines, by the time you add taxes, delivery costs and the LCBO's cut, there isn't much profit for small wineries. By allowing fruit wines to be sold directly in farmers' markets, we would be assisting these small businesses.

In my own riding of Dufferin-Caledon, Downey's Estate Winery has been owned and operated by the Downey family since 1920. Their winery was established in 2001 and within one year began to enjoy remarkable acclaim from their wide variety of delicious fruit wines. In their first year alone, they captured 11 top awards at the Canadian International Wine Challenge at the Toronto Wine and Cheese Show. John Downey teamed up with his three sons, pooled their talents and created a world-class production and retail facility for their winery. The whole family works on the farm and they have also hired an experienced winemaker with an expertise in fruit wines. They wanted to get it right the first time and, obviously, after winning top honours after just one year, they certainly did it right.

We have a lot to be proud of in the fruit wine industry. Last year, Downey's Estate Winery won the coveted fruit wine of the year prize at the annual Canadian Wine Awards. This marks the second time Downey's from Caledon won this award. The winning wine was the raspberry dessert wine. It received the only gold medal in the fruit wine category. John Downey, president of Downey's Estate Winery, says, "We grow the raspberries here on the farm, hand-harvest only the best variety for the wine, and we ferment and bottle everything on-site." We can't find a much purer Ontario product than that.

For two years, Farmers' Markets Ontario has been making representations to Ontario government officials in an attempt to set up a pilot project where fruit wine could be sold at a few farmers' markets. Although several cabinet ministers and MPPs have shown support for the sales of fruit wines in farmers' markets, it wasn't until the honourable member from Leeds-Grenville brought forward Bill 132 that we've had an opportunity to debate it.

I'm pleased to support the passage of Bill 132. I know it would open up markets for small wineries to sell their products outside of their own wineries, and I support the great work in this excellent proposal from the wise and generous member from Leeds-Grenville.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to begin my remarks by thanking the member from Leeds-Grenville for introducing Bill 132, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act.

This bill is intended to permit the sale of fruit wines at farmers' markets, as we know. I believe this is an idea worthy of support.

It's an issue of fairness. According to an October 21, 2007, Toronto Star article written by Catherine Porter, grape wineries receive a 30% rebate for selling VQA wines to the LCBO; fruit wineries, according to the article, don't. VQA producers can sell directly to restaurants without facing fees from the LCBO. Fruit wineries cannot, however, even though they pay the same licensing fees.

In the same article, Jim Warren, the executive director of Fruit Wines of Ontario, is quoted as saying, "Fruit wineries are working at a competitive disadvantage.... Since 1993, we've had many wineries open with talented, educated people making world-class fruit wines, and we can't seem to get the government to understand that."

Because of this uncompetitive playing field, I would suggest that fruit wineries need other marketing venues, including Ontario's seasonal farmers' markets.

This week, I received a letter of support for this bill from Rick Bonnette, the mayor of the town of Halton Hills. In fact, Halton Hills council more than two years ago, passed a resolution in favour of allowing fruit wines to be sold at farmers' markets. I hope that government members will add their voices and their votes in support of Bill 132.

In a letter of July 16, 2008, the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs wrote the following: "I understand the need for the government to consider equal treatment for all of Ontario's artisanal winemakers when new policies and programs are developed. I can also assure you that the Ontario government supports all artisanal winemakers in the province. I will continue to advocate on behalf of the Ontario fruit wine industry in discussions with my cabinet colleagues." So said Leona Dombrowsky.

And in a letter dated August 30, 2007, just before the provincial election, the minister was even more definitive in her support. "I can assure you," she wrote, "that I am still supportive of the Fruit Wines of Ontario proposal, starting with pilot projects for the sale of Ontario fruit wines at farmers' markets." She went on to say, "I will ... voice my support for this idea to my cabinet colleagues."

Based on these past commitments by the minister, it would appear that fruit wine producers have reason to hope this bill will have her support.

In my own riding of Wellington-Halton Hills, the Georgetown farmers' market operates on Saturday mornings in the summer on the main street in Georgetown. It operates from June through to October, and I have enjoyed going to this fabulous farmers' market many, many times. I know that similar farmers' markets exist in many other communities across this province.

I'm pleased to recognize Bert Andrews, who is here today in the members' gallery, for his tremendous and persistent advocacy for the sale and fair treatment of Ontario fruit wines. It has been a pleasure to work with him. Mr. Andrews is a farm leader in Halton county. He is active within the federation of agriculture, and he and

his wife, Lorraine, operate Andrews' Scenic Acres, a very successful farm business in Halton Hills, along with the Scotch Block Winery.

I've also known another fruit winery owner in my riding for many years, Mrs. Gerry Trochta, and she owns Cox Creek Cellars Inc. Estate Winery, again located in Halton Hills, just north of Guelph on Highway 6. They're celebrating their 10th anniversary this week, and they have much to be proud of.

I would encourage, in closing, all members to support Bill 132, and thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Leeds–Grenville has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I want to thank all of my legislative colleagues who participated in the debate. They're very much appreciated. I'm somewhat disappointed in the member for Toronto–Danforth from the NDP, though. He kind of led us down the garden path by initially indicating he was very supportive and then, regrettably, the Christmas spirit was set aside and rigid ideology took over. Bah, humbug.

In any event, this is a modest proposal. I certainly appreciate the input from government members and my own colleagues. The parliamentary assistant, Mr. Rinaldi, talked about a pilot project, and we know that has been talked about for some time. If that is a compromise going forward, I would hope that government members would look at doing pilots on a regional basis. We have a relatively small number of producers in the province, and they all should have the opportunity to participate in pilot programs that are reachable in terms of getting their products to market.

There's no question there are more things to do. This is not a panacea. We talked about the need for marketing, the taxation issues, the direct delivery costs that they're faced with, but this is a modest, small step forward.

I know there are many challenges facing producers. I know for the individual family in my riding, it's a tough go. This is a tough economy that anyone in business is operating in today, so any improvement we can make through legislative initiatives in this House, on a fast-track basis, will be helpful to this one segment of the rural economy.

I want to thank all members for participating, and I certainly very strongly encourage your support in the vote to occur later today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): For those people watching in the galleries and those at home, we will vote on this item in approximately 100 minutes.

ONTARIO ENERGY BOARD AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA COMMISSION DE L'ÉNERGIE DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. Ramsay moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 131, An Act to amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 with respect to retailers of electricity and gas marketers / Projet de loi 131, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario à l'égard des détaillants d'électricité et des agents de commercialisation de gaz.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Ramsay, pursuant to standing order 98, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

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Mr. David Ramsay: I'm very pleased to stand in my place today to enter second reading debate of my private member's bill, Bill 131. It's a bill like this and an issue like this that remind me, after all these years, why I got elected to this place in the first place, and that was to help people. Working with my staff in the constituency office in August and September, I began to realize how big a problem energy retailers are causing in towns in my riding; specifically, Kirkland Lake and Temiskaming Shores. I have been aware of the issue in the past and have staff working on it, but the caseload seems to have grown over the years.

This is also reflected on the Ontario Energy Board website, which shows the number of complaints up exponentially over the years. In 2005, there were approximately 1,000 complaints lodged through the Ontario Energy Board, and it's almost at 5,000 for the first three quarters of this year. So we think we're going to get to about 5,000 complaints this year. It's really growing.

What is happening here is that very high pressure salespeople are coming to people's doors, preying on vulnerable people, coercing them into signing contracts for energy, and sometimes multiple contracts over weeks of time, causing penalty fees, resulting in people getting into financial hardship and sometimes having their power lost.

In one case in my riding, the person was so stressed because the bill collectors and collection agencies were after her because of the debts that were accruing that she was hospitalized and lost her children. The children's aid society had to take her children away from her, because she was no longer in a position to take care of them.

I'm here today to present a bill and talk about some of the ideas I brought forward in this bill, but also to talk about some of the ideas I have learned from some of my colleagues in the House and from some energy associations since then. I hope that through today's debate, we accept the bill as it is written, but with the notion that we can also work together to make it better. Hopefully, it will get passed and referred to committee, and in the new year we can contemplate some additional ideas that I'd like to also talk about today.

First off, what I would like to do is thank my staff, who have worked very hard, not only on these issues, but they have helped me form this legislation. Lyn and Tanya, from Kirkland Lake, are in the gallery today, as is Caroline from my New Liskeard office. Shelly and Nicky from my New Liskeard office also helped me with this. Michael, from my office, and Meghan, my Leg intern,

who is in the gallery today, have also helped me with this. Also, Tara, our legislative counsel here at the Legislative Assembly, has helped me with all the legal nuances to make this bill a reality. I thank them very much for their assistance in developing this bill.

What I found, as I mentioned before, is that many vulnerable people have been really impacted by this. What happens is that many people on disability pension or Ontario Works are basically led to believe they can get cheaper electricity or natural gas prices if they sign these contracts. Invariably, what happens is that they already have a contract with somebody else, and this generates a penalty fee. It's not until two or three months down the road that they get their utility bill and see they are now paying much more for the energy supply they've purchased, but they've also got a bill for maybe \$830 coming at them for a penalty fee for cancelling the contract they were in.

I had one 92-year-old gentleman in Kirkland Lake who signed three different contracts in a six-week period last summer. What happens is that people get fooled and get coerced. In some cases, folks who come to the door misrepresent who they are. They will say they're from the utility company, and say, "I have to check your meter. I have to check your bill. I'm here to make sure we can save you money." Invariably, except maybe for somebody who was very lucky and signed a natural gas contract a couple years ago, before prices really escalated—maybe they did save money, but I've never seen anybody save money on electricity. Invariably, all they're talking about is the raw cost of the power and not about the total bill. So people think that maybe they're going to get electricity for 8.3 cents or 9.8 cents, but that's just for the raw power and not the distribution cost they would pay to the utility. So people get fooled and get coerced.

Sometimes people come to a door where maybe a trustee is helping that person manage their bills and their finances. They get that widower, who maybe isn't really capable of managing her financial situation, to sign and then the trustee gets this bill and wonders, "What happened here? Why is my client paying double for her electricity?" She got fooled at the door, thinking she was doing a good thing by signing on to this contract. A lot of people are being hurt, not only socially but financially.

Also, it comes back onto the government from time to time, because many of these people on ODSP or Ontario Works come back to our district social service board and say, "I can't pay these bills. I'm falling further and further behind," or, "You've got to give me money now for a deposit for Ontario Hydro"—or Toronto Hydro—"because I need to get my power back. Now they ask me for a deposit and I've got to come up with that." It's very disconcerting, it's stressful on people, and it puts them in danger if they lose their heat or their power. So we need to tighten up what happens at the door.

I've made some proposals in my bill that I think would be a start, and as I said, I'd like to talk about some additional ideas that I've picked up from different people since I've introduced this bill.

Of the five things that I'm looking at in this bill, number one is to stop the use of cheque cashing through mail solicitation that would automatically generate a new contract. Vulnerable people see a cheque in their name, and they're obviously very tempted to cash that cheque. And you'd have to look very carefully at the fine print to see that upon cashing of this cheque, you have re-entered into or entered into an energy contract. To me, that's just too generous baiting to people who might not understand what they're getting into by having that inducement, that enticement, waved in front of their face like that. I think that needs to be banned outright.

As I talked about, we need to make sure that the salespeople who deal with the folks in the home deal with the person whose name is on the utility bill. I've given one example where a trustee is taking care of the financial matters for the person. But also, in the way life goes, in partnerships and in marriages, people make social arrangements between themselves about who will take care of the bills. There might be very good reasons for that, and so it might be the case that the wife takes care of the bill for whatever reason.

But the retailer comes in here and the husband signs up, and because he hasn't been dealing with these bills, he doesn't understand what the costs are and has now entered into a contract that may be charging that family twice as much as what they used to pay. For many reasons, households determine who the designated person is to handle finances. I think we should respect that family decision, and so only talk to that person who is in charge of those financial arrangements.

One of the main pieces of this bill, an idea that I'd come up with and an idea that I'm certainly willing to debate down the road, is what I call a reaffirmation letter. Today, what happens is that there is a reaffirmation phone call from the energy company back to the customer, and that is taped. It's to confirm that the customer understood what he or she was doing upon entering into the contract.

I thought that wasn't really good enough, especially the way the contracts were written up, that they weren't clear and they weren't transparent. So an idea that I came up with is that a reaffirmation letter had to go back to the potential customer after the 10-day cooling-off period. That reaffirmation letter had to speak clearly as to what the cost of the energy would be in the proper units upon entering the new contract; what you're paying today; what the penalty fee would be, if any, if you're into an existing contract; and what would be the cost of the energy if you were just to buy it directly from the distributor or, as we used to call it, the utility, such as Toronto Hydro, Ontario Hydro or one of the gas companies. That's how that would work.

The other thing that I've talked about is that when you see your bill that you would get from the distributor, if you purchased from one of these retailers, you don't see the amount in kilowatt hours; you just see a cash amount. What we've purposely done here as a government, to drive conservation, is to have a two-price system so that

people can get their electricity at five cents a kilowatt hour for a base amount and then pay 5.9 cents for an amount over about 400 kilowatt hours a month. This needs to be spelled out in the contract so that people can see what they're paying versus the amount they're using, so that we can still continue to drive conservation.

The other thing is that we've got to, I think, stop the use of cancellation fees when people move. We've had many cases when people, for family reasons, either a death in the family or a family separation, are now having to move out of that household—if you have an account with Ontario Hydro, or Hydro One, you finish up your bill and that's it. The bill doesn't follow you when you sign up with somebody else wherever you relocate. We've even had instances where a person has moved to a rental premises and they now get their utilities supplied through their rent. They're not directly purchasing their energy needs, and yet they are being followed with a penalty fee by that company because they're no longer buying the natural gas or the electricity from this supplier. That has to be stopped too. Sometimes we get people out of this, but it takes three or four months, and they've been paying all these bills and penalty fees, and we think this has to stop.

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In the remaining time that I have, I'd like to go over some of the new suggestions that have been brought forward. I did meet with the Ontario Energy Association and, as an association, they're very concerned about the reputation of this industry. There are still a lot of rogue companies out there causing these complaints. As an association, with the good players there, they want to fix up this industry, and rightfully so. I've seen some of the new contracts that some of the companies are bringing forward, and they're very transparent and they state right upfront that I am entering into this contract because of price stability and not necessarily savings. That's something that does need to be spelled out and, like a fixed-rate mortgage, some people might choose to have a stable energy bill, though we have to point out that the so-called Ontario benefit, or global adjustment, as we call it in government, is always going to be passed on to people and that's not being spelled out at the door either by the salespeople, so that has to happen. We have to stop what we call the overwriting of these contracts, so that if a salesperson comes to the door and sees you're with one company, they leave, and so we stop all this cancellation of contracts.

I'm going to conclude now. I look forward to debate in this House and hearing new ideas that we might have to make this legislation better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to stand here on Bill 131 today. I want to begin by thanking the member for—is it Timiskaming—Cochrane?

Mr. David Ramsay: Yes, sir.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —bringing this bill forward. This is clearly an issue that I would suggest most mem-

bers, if not all members of this House, have had some experience in dealing with from constituents who have felt that they were not properly informed of their rights and/or delivered what they were expected they were getting from energy retailers working within the neighbourhoods they serve.

I also want to commend the member and we're very appreciative of the fact that he has reached out, not only to us, but to members of the third party, and also to industry representatives like the Ontario Energy Association, on ways that we can improve upon the bill as it is now tabled. It is our intention to support the bill as tabled. We've certainly had discussions, and I know the member began getting into some of those. He has clearly indicated to us that there are ways and there are suggestions that, if implemented, would actually improve the bill as written today and actually offer more protection for consumers. We do appreciate the member's willingness to work together. I don't know if it's just that the bill has been tabled at a time that's so close to Christmas and he's feeling charitable, but I actually do suspect that it's part of his nature. He wants to make sure that at the end of the day what consumers are receiving is the best possible protection; also respecting the needs of the industry in order to allow them to operate, but respectfully demanding that the industry operate differently than it has operated in the past, and certainly we all have examples to indicate where those things have gone awry.

The member talked about some of those changes, but he didn't quite get—we don't get enough time in here sometimes, Mr. Speaker. I know you would probably disagree when I'm talking; that probably we should get less. There are a couple of changes that I think are very, very important that the member has certainly agreed to deal with as this goes to committee. The Ontario Energy Board, in 2007, brought in the provision allowing one company to overwrite the contract of another. Essentially what that did, it put consumers in a bind because some of them believed—and why wouldn't they?—that if they signed a contract with company B, the contract that existed with company A no longer would be valid. The fact is that it is valid, and what was happening was that they were getting hit with significant cancellation charges in addition to having to pay for the new energy supply that was coming from company B.

The provision—this is recommended by the OEA, industry has agreed to it and I know the member supports it as well: This would be an amendment to his bill to eliminate that ability of one company to overwrite the contract of another. There would be a register kept so that if a person was under contract, it would be immediately apparent to company B that that person was under contract and therefore they could not enter into a contract with that consumer. That's good protection. That's an improvement to the bill, but it had to start somewhere, and I cannot commend the member enough for bringing this forward.

Another provision they have, and the member has clearly indicated that he's more than happy to work with

that: He wanted to bring in an affirmation letter, and in the discussions that we've had, and I've had the opportunity to discuss this bill directly with the member as well, we all agreed that an affirmation letter on the spot actually gives rise to the possibility of allowing circumstances that would make it less than kosher for the protection of the consumer. So the provision is going to be made in amendments, possibly, that it's still an affirmation call, but there will be significant expectations in that call.

One of the things—the member talked about it and I know I can't show this because it would be a prop, wouldn't it? It's the new contract, the standardized contract that we suggest and the OEA agrees. If I could just read a couple of the provisions that are in this contract—I think this would give much more protection to the consumer than the current situation. The first part of it—I won't say whose contract it is because that would be unfair: "I have received a completed and signed a copy of this agreement and I understand and accept:

"a) This agreement offers price stability and does not guarantee savings." Good language.

"b) This agreement is with" the retailer, blah, blah, blah, can't give the name, "and not with my local natural gas or electricity distributor ('utility').".

We don't want to talk about the contract of a particular company. They're making it clear that they are not the energy utility, and this is something that has led to a great deal of confusion. People have been beset by a rogue agent who says, "I'm with Hydro. I'm with the utility." So this protects them from that point.

The two most clear concerns—and another one:

"c) 'This agreement only covers the cost of' the 'commodity itself,' and you will be 'responsible for regulated delivery, transmission, transportation, debt retirement, and other costs' from the utility.

It also has in there that you will have to reconfirm this by a recorded phone call between 11 and 60 days from signing. I think those are some of the provisions and concerns. We'll address some of the concerns that the member had with respect to the reality that there were some agents there who were not following the rules. This will protect the agent—I have 12 minutes, Mr. Speaker. I'm using all the time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Okay.

Mr. John Yakabuski: This will give much more protection to the consumer than was present in the past. In my discussions with the OEA, they didn't have problems—and I guess Shane Pospisil will be president of the OEA. I give him a lot of credit for taking on this issue as well, as an association, and recognizing that there is a problem out there and we have to work collectively to try to improve it. I can tell you that, other than some of those things, they were quite impressed with the quality of Mr. Ramsay's bill. Of course, when we get to committee and we get to the possibilities of amendments, other issues will come up, because now, if this bill goes forward—and I expect that it will—we're going to get more publicity out there and some people will make some of their own comments.

1500

One of my own caucus members received a letter, and these are some of the concerns:

"Consumers believe the energy retailer is affiliated with the local utility." We know that this new contract is going to put an end to that belief because it's there, in clear language, what the member expects;

"Consumers believe the product will guarantee savings over the utility price." Well, the very first line is that it offers stability but does not guarantee savings;

"The consumer is not aware of the existence of early termination fees and cannot easily ascertain the amount of the fee." It's very clear in the contracts today what, if any, early termination fees there are.

I think what we've got here is a winning situation begun, quite frankly, through the efforts of the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane—but also working as a group with the Ontario Energy Association and the electricity retailers to bring what we believe will be a better bill offering better consumer protection. Of course, when this goes to committee, we'll all have a chance to look at all of the suggestions again.

I do appreciate the work of the member. We're thankful that he was willing to work with us and bring us into the discussions. I think that is a good indication of how things can happen in this chamber.

In my remaining time, I want to take this opportunity, because it is the last sitting of this House, to wish every member of this Legislature—and I know that everybody here works very hard. We have our debates and disagreements on many issues, but I think we're all here because we believe our mission here is to work for the betterment of people of this province, and I believe everyone does do that. I want to thank everybody for the efforts they make and wish them a merry Christmas, happy holidays, a happy Hanukkah, and whatever other season you may be celebrating at this time. I look forward to seeing all of you in the new year.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: In general, the NDP supports the kinds of changes that have been detailed in the bill by the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane.

As everyone in this House will be aware from talking to their constituency staff or talking to their constituents, there have been some very nasty abuses perpetrated by these energy marketing companies.

One of my colleagues told me a story about a company that sent cheques to people at their homes, not being very clear that if you took that cheque—I think it was \$30—signed it and deposited it, you were signed on to an energy marketing contract with that company. When you do that in a community where people are hard-pressed, where there has been a lot of job loss or maybe people are just trying to get by on minimum wage, they are vulnerable to that kind of come-on. People got signed on to contracts and had themselves welded to agreements that required them to pay far more for electricity than they should have paid.

My constituency office is in East York, in Toronto, and beside my office there's a very good, well-run small business—a capable man and a person who has a lot on his plate. He doesn't spend a lot of time going through all his bills. About a year and a half ago, he came to me to say that his accountant had seen the renewal notice from an energy marketing company and had not realized that if he didn't send the renewal notice back, he would automatically be renewed. He missed that and was renewed, and he was paying far more for natural gas than I was paying on my natural gas bill. That sort of approach poisons the waters, angers people, makes them distrustful.

My mother, who may well be watching right now—

Interjection: I hope she is.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: She may well be watching right now—goes for coffee with a group of seniors at the Lime Ridge Mall in Hamilton on a regular basis. They are in their 70s, some in their 80s.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the kind comments from my colleagues in the House. In any event—

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate your kind comments, colleagues.

She has told me stories of her friends who get these calls from companies, find that they have signed on to these contracts and don't have the ability to find their way through the web or network of agreements, contracts, stories they've been told, to get out of them. In fact, their sense, and a sense I've had from people who have done some work with these companies, is that seniors are targeted.

I say to the member who brought forward this bill, but also to those companies: If anyone has ever made an extraordinarily strong argument for regulation of the energy sector, you—energy marketers—have made it. You have made it very clear that simply letting you run amok is bad news for the population of this province. Bad news.

Going back to the bill itself, my colleague from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke talked about the affirmation letter and concerns about the potential for people at the door to perhaps be subjected to pressure to send in an affirmation letter. I assume that in the course of this bill going to committee, we'll have an opportunity to discuss it, talk about exactly how we deal with making sure that there is an un-pressurized, an un-intimidated, an un—what can I say?—a voluntary decision on the part of a customer, and not a situation where someone is bullied into, harassed into, pushed into signing a contract.

Obviously, people have to know that they're not necessarily going to save money. In fact, with most of the contracts I've seen, most of the prices I've seen, people don't save money. It is generous to say that it will stabilize price. That's right: If you buy at a price higher than anyone else is going to charge for a long time, you may well have a stabilized price. It may not be to your advantage.

People have to know about cancellation fees. I've had constituents come to my office, sometimes people whose first language was not English, who had no idea that they were going to be charged for cancelling this contract. They are used to dealing with utilities like Toronto Hydro or public utility companies where cancelling contracts didn't put them in the target hairs, the crosshairs, of a company that's going to try to make a lot of money out of them. Those things have to be clear.

It also has to be clear that the price they're paying for energy doesn't include all the costs: the debt service charge to pay for dead nuclear power plants, the transmission costs, a variety of other costs that will be loaded on top of the bill that ultimately comes through the door—it makes sense.

All of those disclosures and all of those safeguards are needed and should be brought forward. But I think we all have to recognize that there is a larger issue here, and that's the privatization of the energy system, particularly the electricity system.

I think it is a mistake to give too much legitimacy to those who essentially are people who game on top of the utility system that we as a province have set up. To talk about competition in this context is really to be playing games, verbal games. The competition really is a race to find people who are vulnerable, people who can be confused, people who can be pushed into signing a contract.

It was interesting to me that in a lot of cases, people have been given the very strong impression that the salespeople at their doors are actually from the utility companies. Because the utility companies are seen as acting in the public interest, they have a lot of credibility. The reality is you're dealing with a salesperson who is trying to maximize, possibly on commission, and that person has no interest in the person they're dealing with other than to maximize the amount of commission they're getting and the money they're getting out of them.

1510

To talk about this bill today, you need to go back and think about energy in Ontario and our history in the last decade or so. We've had a long history of public electrical utilities in Ontario. We had a central company, Ontario Hydro; we had local distribution companies; and we had a situation in which, although there were substantial differences on policy direction, people knew that ultimately utility companies were answerable to the population as a whole and that the money they put into that system was there to provide that service.

When the argument was made for deregulation, the argument was made that competition would reduce rates. Apparently not. With these new contracts, companies are put in a situation where they have to say, "No, not necessarily reduction of rates but stabilization of rates." People were told that there would be customer choice. Customer choice between one marketing company and another trying to bump up your bill is not choice; it is bad news.

We were very much influenced by what was going on south of the border, in the United States. There was a whole era of deregulation of the electricity system in the United States that many paid dearly for. Look at California, where the deregulation went far beyond the marketers going door to door but to a whole system in which companies like Enron gamed—that's a very nice word—profoundly manipulated the provision of and distribution of electricity to that society, causing huge spikes in electricity prices, disruption to that community, huge debts to electricity companies and, ultimately, the need for the government of California to step in in a substantial way.

We, here, had a somewhat gentler version, although a version that, when it came out, led to price volatility, led to situations where companies had to cut back on operations, led to situations where companies had to start operating through the middle of the night—which, having been a night-shift worker myself, I have to say is never a pleasant thing—and companies looked at shutting down through the summer when prices were peaking.

This government here in Ontario that brought on deregulation found itself facing a crisis; they pulled back. Now we are dealing with the detritus of that particular initiative. We are trying, through this bill today, to clean up some of the worst excesses, but I have to say, dealing with the worst excesses is not going to fully clean up the market. It's not going to fully protect the people of this province. Right now, people who have signed on to these energy marketing companies are paying a premium. They are supporting a whole layer of salespeople, a whole layer of accounting departments, a whole layer of functionaries who are not in fact providing a service; they are just simply acting as intermediaries between generators and buyers of power. For us in this province, these companies are not providing a useful service.

So I want to say about this bill: It's a good thing it's here. I look forward to it being improved in committee, look forward to some greater protection for consumers, but have to say overall that the fundamental problem is the remainder of the deregulation that came with a number of years of mistakes around the electricity system. My hope is that, in the long run, we will get back to a system in which the producers of energy in this province, publicly owned, will deal directly with people and we will not have those who will be making extra dollars off the backs of those whom they can confuse or intimidate into signing a contract.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: If there is one thing that Bill 131 certainly is, it is a law whose time has come and whose need has very properly galvanized all-party support in this vigorous and very demanding Legislature.

More than that, and I'm going to speak especially to the people in northwest Mississauga who have called me on this particular issue, this bill addresses some of the disgraceful and shoddy marketing practices by unethical and unscrupulous retailers that bring shame and disrepute

to the otherwise stellar efforts by our two particular utilities: Enbridge, which supplies our natural gas in northwest Mississauga, and Enersource Hydro Mississauga, which supplies electricity.

It's a simple bill, a focused bill. It seeks and delivers clarity in how electricity and gas are marketed to consumers. The complaints that all MPPs' offices have heard over the past several years, I think, are reflected in this bill with some measures with teeth and measures that fundamentally address the slanted marketing tactics by retailers in this particular sector. It brings clarity and consistency to this particular sector of remarketing natural gas or electricity.

I have warned people not to turn over their bill. I have put some material on my website about the practices followed by these door-to-door salespeople. I have even had them at my own door and had them claim some of the most outrageous things: that it's the government that's driving up the cost of their electricity, and if they want to protect themselves from more government action, then they've got to turn over their electricity or natural gas bill and sign on the spot. I've sat there and said, "Surely you've got a business card. Give me your business card. Show me your authorization." At the end I'll say, "I happen to be the government. Now get out of my house; get off my property." I have made a complaint to the Ontario Energy Board, and I have encouraged my constituents to bring their complaints to the Ontario Energy Board.

So if people come to your home and ask you to turn over your bill, and they won't tell you who they are—they sort of intimate they might be from your local utility, but really they aren't, and they're trying to get you to sign one of these things—get their name, get their card and make your complaint to the Ontario Energy Board. That too has teeth, along with the measures in the bill proposed by the very hard-working member from Timiskaming-Cochrane.

People have asked us, as MPPs, "What can you do? How can you help us stop this particular disgraceful practice?" The MPP for Timiskaming-Cochrane has heard our complaints from all parties and has said, "This is one measure we can use to stop it. This is one way the Legislature can address some of the problems people are facing."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Mauro: Quickly, in my three minutes, I'm going to begin by introducing my son Dustin, who is visiting today, sitting in the east members' gallery. He's taking his father out for dinner this evening, and I'm very much looking forward to that.

I also want to very quickly thank the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane for bringing forward private member's Bill 131, which at its core is a consumer protection piece that I think, once we've had a chance to see this piece walk its way through the process of this place, will probably end up with very broadly based support; at least that's what I think we all hope. I'm sure,

from my experience in my constituency office, that most, if not all, of you here today, who do your work in your constituencies, have had similar experiences as I and certainly the staff in my constituency office have had with this very unfortunate way of getting people to enlist in electricity and gas contracts.

As I've said, I want to thank the member for bringing this forward. I think the reaffirmation letter he has in here is obviously the key piece of the legislation. This is going to provide an opportunity for sober second thought for people who find themselves encumbered with something they probably wish they had not done. As we understand it, many of these retailers, although not all, are engaged in what are, quite frankly, predatory and insidious practices when it comes to marketing their product at the doorstep, and preying on some of the most vulnerable citizens we have in the province. I think that, at its core, this is going to be a very wonderful piece of consumer protection, and we all have to thank the member for bringing it forward.

As I understand it, it will be require that the contractor mail the reaffirmation letter to the consumer, and the consumer will have to then send it back, signed. This will obviously provide an opportunity for them to rethink anything they may have done or entered into. Contained in that letter, which is key to letting people know, will have to be the price they will be paying; the penalties for cancellation of a contract, should they go forward and enter into it; and the current price that the consumer is paying. So very clearly laid out for them in that reaffirmation letter will be an ability for the potential consumer, on a new contract, to compare what it is they're about to enter into—or may have already entered into in a preliminary way—to what they are already paying. I think this is the central piece of it.

1520

As well, I have to mention and thank the member for this cheque-cashing part. It's hard to believe this almost negative billing thing. I'm trying to make an analogy to what some of the cable companies were doing in the past, where somebody would receive a cheque and sign it and, by default, have entered into a contract. Thank you very much for eliminating that as well.

This has my complete support. I have to tell the member he's made my constituency office staff very happy, and I'm happy for the people in Thunder Bay–Atikokan and I—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Let me be dramatic this afternoon, on this last day of the Legislature. Let me simply say first, of course, thank you to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

This is a clear case of capitalism gone awry, capitalism without restraint. That's what we have here right now, when we look at this electric energy retail business. The significance that the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane indicates is—here are the number of complaints from 2005. In 2005, 1,099 complaints; in 2006,

1,913 complaints; in 2007, 4,475 complaints; in 2008—I think he mentioned it earlier—from January to September, 4,560 complaints about one item.

I have a letter here from Primrose Housing Co-operative. The lady who mistakenly signed the contract says in a letter, "I am writing" to you, Mr. Ruprecht, "to ask for your help in dealing with Ontario Energy Savings LP"—that's a company—because what she's discovered is that once she signed up and the new energy bill came, her bill, and I have a copy of it here, was over \$6,000 more than under the old system. It is clear to see that there is a major problem here, and I want to thank the member for introducing one of the best private members' bills there is today.

Applause.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: That's right, no doubt about it.

Now, from Primrose Housing Co-op, she further says that she called the Ontario Energy Savings company up and they told her bluntly, "If you want to cancel, guess how much we're going to charge you?"

Interjections: How much?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: They want to charge her over \$8,000 to cancel this contract. This is not just outrageous; this is terrible. So what I'm going to say is that it is obvious that the member has hit a nerve here.

People come to your house and they say one thing to you, "You will save on electricity," and that's what the person in the house wants to know. Whether he is an elderly person, whether he is a person who doesn't speak English well, one question always comes up, "If I sign, will I save?" And the answer inevitably is, "Of course you will save. Not only will you save a few bucks, but you will save a lot." Consequently—and my time is up—I want to simply indicate this is wonderful bill. We have complained about it for a long time, and finally and succinctly, here Mr. Ramsay has done something very special. He's giving all of us a Christmas gift, and the people of Ontario should be happy with Bill 131.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Mario Sergio: I would like to add my comments and support on Bill 131. I have to congratulate, as well, the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

This is a problem that's affecting every member. There's no question that it's a problem that must be addressed, and this is a good start. I do hope that indeed the bill will travel. Listening to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane there, he'd like to see some improvements. I think that's a good step, because it needs to be addressed.

In my area, I have too many seniors who come to my office on a regular basis with either complaints or bills in their hands. It's not what these companies are doing; it's how they are doing it. A few years ago we dealt with making the bill, if you will, more transparent. But what happened to that? I think we complicated it more for the consumers out there.

The problem that we continue to get in my constituency office is that, yes, what they charge per kilowatt

hour is what they said they would charge, but there is one area where we have no control, where our taxpayers have no control, and that is delivery charges, debt taxes, administration and whatever. So they say, "How come I'm paying per kilowatt hour what they said I would be paying, but the bill is more and the consumption is less?" I think there is more to be done. I am pleased to see that the bill is here, and I hope that it will be travelling to address all of those issues. It is not only the per-kilowatt-hour charge but it's all the other charges.

I had two ladies walk into my office. One said, "Can I cash this cheque?" I looked on the back and I said, "Well, if you cash it, it means you accept the conditions." The other lady said, "What contract? I don't have any contract with this company. This cheque is made to my husband's name, and my husband passed away 10 years ago. So who are these people? Why are they sending me this cheque?" It is how they do it that is very underhanded, and something must be done.

I commend the member for Timiskaming-Cochrane for bringing this forward. I hope the bill will travel, will come back and will address some of the issues and make a better bill.

I thank you, Speaker, for the three minutes that you have allotted me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Timiskaming-Cochrane, Mr. Ramsey, has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. David Ramsay: I must thank all of my colleagues from all sides of the House for not only their support for this bill, as they've indicated in their speeches, but also their very generous comments about the bill.

I know why it's resonating with them, because I know all of you are here for the same reason that I am here: to help our constituents. Especially when we see something happening in society that particularly seems to prey on vulnerable people, it tends to really get to us. Those of us who are quite capable in managing our own affairs cringe when we see how many people are taken advantage of like this. Thank you for bringing all those various examples to us in the House. I'd like to thank you for that, and thank you for your commitment to continue to work with me, if we do pass this in a few minutes, to make it better. I certainly admit that this was a good start, and there are some other good ideas that have been brought forward and I acknowledge that. Working together in a democratic process like this, we can make it better by listening to people and different organizations, and that's much appreciated.

I'd also like to thank Minister George Smitherman and his staff for working with me. I know the minister appreciates that there's an issue here too and it has to be addressed, and we continue to agree to work together.

So again, I thank everybody for this and hope that you would support the bill. I would look forward to working with you on this in the new year. And I wish everybody the best for the season. Take care.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will vote on this item in about 50 minutes.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT (REGISTERED
DISABILITY SAVINGS PLANS), 2008
LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI A TRAIT À L'AIDE SOCIALE
(RÉGIMES ENREGISTRÉS
D'ÉPARGNE-INVALIDITÉ)

Ms. Jones moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 94, An Act to amend the Ontario Disability Support Program Act, 1997 and the Ontario Works Act, 1997 to take into account funds held in or withdrawn from registered disability savings plans / Projet de loi 94, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur le Programme ontarien de soutien aux personnes handicapées et la Loi de 1997 sur le programme Ontario au travail pour tenir compte des fonds détenus dans des régimes enregistrés d'épargne-invalidité ou retirés de ceux-ci.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order number 98, Ms. Jones, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'd like to start my remarks this afternoon by thanking all the individuals and organizations who wrote, e-mailed and called me since I tabled this legislation last June. I'm humbled by all the support and encouragement that I've received.

In e-mail after e-mail I have been told that registered disability savings plans will make a real difference in the lives of disabled persons across Ontario. The RDSP is a major development for disabled persons and their families who want to save for their future.

1530

Caring for children with disabilities is a daily concern for many Canadians, especially as parents age and begin to worry about their children's future. To address this need, the federal government, in their 2007 budget, established the registered disability savings plan, a plan that would allow parents, grandparents and other family members to save for the long-term financial security of their children. The RDSP is a taxation measure that allows families of children with physical, mental or developmental disabilities to invest up to \$200,000 in a tax-free shelter, much like a registered education savings plan.

Because not every family will have the financial ability to invest, the RDSP program is supplemented with the federal disability savings grant and the federal disability savings bond, which will provide cash contributions to the plans. It is important for all members of this House to understand that a low-income Ontarian can simply open a plan, and without making a single financial contribution, they will begin to receive the disability savings grant from the federal government, up to \$20,000.

Over time, RDSPs will provide billions of dollars to supplement the incomes of thousands of Ontarians with disabilities. It will enhance the quality of life for Ontarians with disabilities, many of whom currently rely on social assistance and live in poverty.

As Joanne Purdon, chair of the Ontario Consumer and Family Advisory Council for the Ontario division of the Canadian Mental Health Association, stated in a November news release, "It seems unfair that a disabled person has to choose between having money for their daily needs now, including rent and food, or saving for their future. If Bill 94 "passes, RDSP would allow a supplementary monthly income to be drawn upon allowing individuals some basic amenities that we often take for granted, such as a telephone, cable, groceries, clothing and supplementing their rent which is often 40% or more of their monthly ODSP income."

In order for the RDSP to work for families, however, each provincial and territorial government needs to introduce changes to ensure that families who put money away in an RDSP are not penalized for proactively saving for their children's future. My private member's bill proposes to make the change in Ontario. After speaking with families who are trying to plan for the financial future of their disabled child, I drafted the Social Assistance Statute Law Amendment Act. The purpose of my private member's bill is to allow Ontario families to save by removing the RDSP as an asset when calculating monthly disability benefits.

When I speak to parents, their number one concern is what is going to happen to their children when they are no longer able to look after them themselves. Parents are anxious to invest in an RDSP. They already have a tremendous burden of care, often giving up a second income so one parent can stay at home, yet they are committed to setting aside additional resources for the future. In the last six months, I've heard from parents across the province who are urging me to move forward so they can make a contribution for the 2009 tax year.

So, each province needs to act. Of course, Ontario has, at the eleventh hour, in a highly unusual Sunday morning news release, announced its intention to make this change, but has not provided anyone with a copy of the regulations for our review. I asked the minister to release the regulation so stakeholders and families could review it and was quite surprised when she flatly said no. For that reason and the fact that regulations can be made and changed in the future by cabinet without any public input or notification, I have decided to proceed with second reading of Bill 94. I believe that the change should be made by amending the statutes.

Families want to make long-term investments for the financial security of their children. We, as legislators, should make a similar long-term commitment by placing the RDSP guarantee in law—a guarantee that all RDSP investments and withdrawals will not impact on eligibility for any other disability entitlement, now or in the future.

The vice-president of OASIS, Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs, pointed out why legislative change is needed:

"This type of amendment to the Ontario Disability Support Program Act and Ontario Works Act is needed and long overdue. For many years, individuals have been

penalized by these acts when the federal government has given increases to funding to individuals on disability pensions, only to have it clawed back by the provincial government."

Amending the acts provides a long-term commitment and truly lives up to the spirit of the federal government's desire to enhance the quality of life for persons with a disability by creating the RDSP.

I ask the Liberal members to support this change. There's no reason not to support Bill 94, as it supports your own recommendation in the transformation agenda. When Ernie Parsons was the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services, he prepared a report entitled Consultations Regarding the Transformation of Developmental Services. Recommendation 11 deals specifically with the need to improve families' ability to plan for the future needs of individuals with developmental disabilities. I'm going to touch on two of the recommendations that Mr. Parsons made:

- allow ODSP recipients to allocate their spending for current and future needs; for example, it allows contributions to an RRSP;

- hold consultation with the federal government with the purpose of establishing a future disability trust fund to permit parents to set aside funding for their children's future needs.

Ernie Parsons had it right with his recommendations. The RDSP is that savings instrument because the federal government has committed to supplement plans established by families with disability savings grants and disability savings bonds.

Although the Liberals have been dragging their feet on this important change, I think they might also want to take note of the many organizations that have come out in support of Bill 94.

"Community Living Ontario wishes to thank you for your advocacy on the registered disability savings program." That was written to me recently. "Your Bill 94, the Social Assistance Statute Law Amendment Act, would introduce changes that would be a tremendous support to people who have an intellectual disability and their families."

"I would like to thank you for introducing Bill 94, which would exempt RDSP assets and income from ODSP calculations. The Schizophrenia Society of Ontario is in full support of this bill, and we intend to do whatever we can to make sure it is passed." And they certainly did.

"The Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, applauds the creation of the registered disability savings plan ... recently announced in budget 2007, and fully supports the passing of Bill 94 because the bill recognizes the value of providing financial security to Ontario's most vulnerable."

Families For a Secure Future: "We would like to congratulate Ms. Jones for proposing this legislation for Ontario. As parents, we want to be able to invest funds for the future care of our child, but the current situation penalizes us from making an RDSP investment."

Another one: "I am a board member of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Grey-Bruce branch, and recognize all too well the need for such a bill. The passage of Bill 94 will be one more small step in allowing people with disabilities, and specifically people with a serious mental illness, to lead a life free from financial worry."

Again: "We at DeafBlind Ontario Services have been following Bill 94 with great interest. Thank you for your help! And congratulations on the bill!"

Even the media are urging you to move forward. Mike Burke-Gaffney of the Toronto Sun wrote: "Will Dalton Do the Right Thing? Federal plan to help families with disabled children hinges on Ontario's co-operation."

André Picard wrote: "RDSP plans go on sale in December. There is no excuse for every province and territory to not have committed to amend its rules by that time."

Perhaps the ones you should really be listening to are your own constituents—the families whose children will receive the benefits from the RDSP. I know that each and every one of the members of government has received heartfelt letters urging them to support Bill 94.

The Premier received the following letter:

"We are writing you this letter as our MPP, as well as the Premier of Ontario.... We are writing to ask that you take immediate steps to ensure that people with disabilities living in Ontario are able to take advantage of the new registered disability savings plan ... without having investments in this plan negatively affect other benefits provided by the government such as the ... ODSP ...

"Bill 94 introduced on June 12 by Sylvia Jones in the Ontario Legislature would amend the Ontario disability support program ... and the Ontario Works Act to exclude funds held in a registered disability savings plan ... from determination of assets. It would also amend the act to exclude funds withdrawn from a registered disability savings plan from the determination of income

"As this program comes into effect in 2009, you will understand that we are anxious for the Ontario government to clarify its position on RDSP investments before we proceed much further towards the end of the year. Your immediate action to ensure that people in Ontario are able to take advantage of this important program will be greatly appreciated."

Another one to the member for Scarborough—Agincourt: "I would like to encourage the passage of Bill 94.... My daughter has Down's syndrome and would benefit from the passing of this bill."

1540

To the member from St. Catharines: "We, the undersigned parents, grandparent, aunts, uncles ... urge you to support private member's Bill 94 ... allowing Ontario families to save by removing the RDSP as an asset when calculating monthly disability benefits.

"Private member's Bill 94, introduced by Sylvia Jones, MPP Dufferin—Caledon and Conservative critic for the Ministry of Community and Social Services,

addresses the inequity in Ontario, to exempt the RDSP as an asset and/or income. Clearly it would be wrong for the government of Ontario or any other government to claw back funds set aside for people with disabilities by their families. We urge you to pass Bill 94."

The member for Chatham—Kent received a letter from the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario, Chatham Kent urging him to pass the bill, and on and on it goes.

A parent with a son who has Down's syndrome is trying to plan for his son's future. I could go on and on talking about the hundreds of letters that I've received. It has been very moving to read how Ontario parents are paying attention and covering this.

I tabled Bill 94 to bring positive change for all Ontarians with a disability. I ask you to support my bill because it would entrench in legislation the guarantee that RDSP assets will not impact disability benefits in 2009 and beyond. I ask you, in this last debate on the last day of the legislative session, to be non-partisan and put the lives of others first.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I want to greatly commend the member from Dufferin—Caledon. Certainly, this is a bill whose time has come; in fact, in some ways it has come. But the question is, how did it get here? She has every right in the world to stand up and ask for the accolades to be given to her, because she was the originator of this bill.

This place can be intensely partisan, and I think people in Ontario have very little patience for how partisan it can be some days. As an opposition member presenting a private member's bill, we all know the way that occurs and the fact that one has absolutely no chance—and I say it again—absolutely no chance of seeing your private member's bill pass. That's quite a shock to those in the communities we serve. The only thing we can hope, the best we can hope is that the government hears it and introduces it as their own. In schools, it's called plagiarism, but here it's called the way things are done.

In a system like that, the very least the government could do is give credit where credit is due, to the opposition members who actually come up with these bills, present them, go to all the work with their stakeholders to make sure the bill is well rounded and well represented and push it forward. Sometimes this involves campaigning across the province. I know it certainly did with the \$10 minimum wage campaign. Surely the least that could happen around private members' bills brought in by opposition members is that they are acknowledged and that their bills are passed.

Again, I don't see that anybody in the province of Ontario would really be upset with the government for doing so. In fact, I think, if anything, the government ranks would grow in terms of estimation with their own constituents if they saw that they were being non-partisan for a change. This is the very least that one could ask. After all, we've all been elected to represent our constituents in the best way possible. Again, it would show a spirit of co-operation, particularly at this time of year.

Interjections.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Although I hear the catcalls from the government side, in particular from the Minister of Education, about the redundancy of the member from Dufferin-Caledon presenting a bill that, in part, has been passed by the government, I don't think it's redundant at all. In fact, it's really the only way to claim some victory in this place.

I remember one of the saddest days I've ever witnessed in this House was when our own member from Hamilton Centre witnessed the government bringing in a bill that was clearly hers to protect firefighters, presumptive diagnosis around certain sorts of cancer. Not once did the minister who stood up and presented that bill credit the member from Hamilton Centre for actually organizing with the stakeholders, actually drafting and working on the bill, actually presenting the bill. So in one heartfelt moment—I remember the member was in tears—she sees her bill, which she has worked so hard on, being passed. That's good; that's wonderful; we're all pleased about it. On the other hand, it's almost, again, like watching another student produce your master's thesis and get their master's for it without even crediting the original author. Again, one can only ask for credit where credit is due, which is what this member from Dufferin-Caledon is doing. She doesn't deserve anything but accolades. She doesn't deserve anything but credit for what she has done, and what she has done in particular for those who are poorest in our communities.

I know in my own constituency I had a mother who had a son with schizophrenia, and she was diagnosed with cancer. She was a single parent. She said, "What is going to happen to my child when I pass on?" She was being very realistic. Again, she was dealing with a situation where the savings that she had been putting aside would be clawed back from the already meagre ODSP. By the way, for those who perhaps don't know—it's that time of year—what people on Ontario disability make, let me tell you that it's around \$1,000 a month. Remember, these are people who cannot work. They have disabilities; they are unable to work. Imagine trying to live in the city of Toronto on \$1,000 a month and with disabilities. Think about that. With the extra expenses that disabilities bring upon one and with having to pay your rent, feed yourself and sometimes your children when you cannot work, it's absolutely abominable. It's egregious that this government insists that those people be kept in poverty.

We just were privy to the National Council of Welfare report that indicates that social assistance incomes in Ontario have fallen by almost 30% in real-dollar terms since 1992, the greatest drop in any province in Canada. According to the report, between 1992 and 2007 a lone parent's welfare declined by almost \$5,500, or 25%. A couple with two children saw a loss of almost 28%. That's ODSP.

Welfare—OW—is even worse. You'll know why we have homeless on our streets when you know that somebody—a single male, for example—who is living

with welfare payments of around \$500 a month could clearly not afford to pay the rent and feed himself. They have to use shelters and they have to use food banks. Again, this is in a province which despite the current recession is one of the wealthiest jurisdictions in the world. Especially at this time, we should be absolutely ashamed of that record.

Even with the much-ballyhooed child benefit rates that the McGuinty government talks about that will give \$1,300 per child, not by tomorrow, not by Christmas, but by 2012, a single mother with two children will still be stuck deep in poverty, \$6,000 below the low-income cut-off. And, you know, this isn't partisan. Quebec does better: Quebec's welfare and ODSP rates are above the low-income cut-off; ie, above the poverty line. So does Newfoundland. So we've got a Conservative government and we've got a Liberal government who do way better than this government. The question is, why doesn't this government do better? Again, we're talking about, particularly in the case of Ontarians with disabilities, those who cannot work. I don't know in what jurisdiction it's okay to keep those with disabilities, just by definition, below the poverty line.

The member from Dufferin-Caledon has brought in a bill. It doesn't ask a great deal. It gives a little bit extra—a little bit extra; that's all we're talking about here, just a little bit, a soupçon—for those families who need it most. It certainly has had its impact on the government. Clearly, all the letters, all the work that she's done to get in touch with all of these organizations, has paid off; the government has responded. In presenting this bill today, she has simply taken credit, and as a feminist I applaud her. I think women's work is very rarely, first of all, given the money it's due or the credit it's due. We know that in the province of Ontario women make 71 cents on the dollar. Well, here we have a woman in the opposition who has brought in a private member's bill who has the gumption, who has the courage to stand up and say, "Guess what? It's my bill. It's not your bill; it's my bill. Thank you for recognizing it, thank you for enacting it, but guess what? You did not originate it; I did."

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I say, hats off to her. Good for her. Good that she represents her constituents. Good that she does what she's elected to do. Good that she did the spadework that was necessary. Good that she did all the work that was necessary in drafting it. Good that for the last many months she has been in contact with all the stakeholders that go into a bill like that. Good that she and she alone, quite frankly, thought this one up and, in turn, benefited the most needy of her own constituents—not only her own now but right across the province of Ontario, people who now will not get their RDSPs clawed back can thank Sylvia Jones. She's not a member of my party—we have political differences—but certainly I hope that in the halcyon day that we will be sitting across the aisle, we could at least give credit where credit is due and acknowledge that when a private member of an opposition party does the work responsible for a bill, that person gets the credit for the work that she's done.

So just to conclude, since it's the last time we're all together before school lets out, I want to say, as well, merry Christmas to everyone here. I know we all work very, very hard. I know that to be a member of provincial Parliament in this province, we're putting in 12-hour days, sometimes 14 or more. I know that it's not a vacation over Christmas—would that it were—but we will go back to our ridings and run from one event to another, from one appointment to another. I know we all work very hard.

I, along with all Ontarians, would like to see this be less acrimonious a place, less partisan a place and, in the spirit of the season, whether it be Christmas, whether it be Hanukkah or Kwanza, whatever vacation or holiday we celebrate, I certainly hope that when we come back in the new year and someone has the gumption to come forward to work hard on behalf of their constituents, all sides recognize it; all sides give accolades where they're due; all sides move forward, take the best of ideas—by all means, do. But don't just plagiarize them. Take them. Pass private members' bills. Why not? Who would it hurt? There's no question who has the most members here. Why don't we pass Bill 94 as Bill 94, as Sylvia Jones, member for Dufferin—Caledon, and benefit everyone in the province of Ontario, in particular those young girls and young boys who might think one day of running for office, perhaps not in the governing party but know that still their fingerprints, their touch, is on laws that change lives?

So again, best of the season. We're all looking forward to getting out of here. We're all looking forward to voting. Hey, be generous.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: First, I think this would be the last time for me, in this year, to stand up in my place and speak. I want to take the opportunity to wish all of my constituents of London—Fanshawe and all the people across the province of Ontario and all my colleagues from both sides of the House happy holidays. Hopefully when we come back next year, the whole economic circumstances will be a lot better and people will be a lot happier.

Now I want to go back to Bill 94. I listened to the member from Parkdale—High Park speaking about a feminist issue versus a man's issue. I don't know what she was talking about, but regardless, I'm not going to go that way; I want to focus on Bill 94.

No doubt about it, the member from Dufferin—Caledon showed passion about the disabled people since we had the chance to travel the province together to deal with the disability issue. We listened to many different constituents, we listened to many different stakeholders from across the province of Ontario on this very issue.

I believe that our government has been in the process for many, many years, since we got elected in 2003, to make sure all the people with disabilities have a right and access to many different jobs, have a right to break all barriers, because it's important to all of us to change and

break those barriers, whether attitudinal, physical or financial barriers, to allow all the people with a disability to enter the market and be able to address themselves to be able to work and support themselves and their families.

I got the chance many different times to go to different communities and talk to the disabled community. When we talk about the disabled community, we don't focus on the disability part; we focus on the ability part, because I believe strongly that every one of us, despite the circumstances, has some kind of ability, and then we focus on that ability.

I want to congratulate the member from Dufferin—Caledon. Despite what the member from High Park says, we commend everyone in this House when they bring in ideas and bring up private members' bills to enlighten this House, to discuss them with all of us and to exchange ideas. This is a place for exchanging ideas, for creating a wave of ideas to benefit the people of Ontario. That's what this place is for. When we come and discuss, we credit the opposition sometimes when they put the government on the spot and make them accountable, and that's why we are here: to serve the people of Ontario.

I'm proud to be a part of government and proud to be the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services, who has been working very hard to address this issue in a very detailed way, because it's important for all of us to support people with disabilities and the vulnerable people among us. I believe strongly that it's our job to give people a push and a kind of support, because we are only strong if all of us walk together. Sometimes people with disabilities need some kind of support—a small support. Then, when they get that support, they'll be able to walk with the rest of us in order to strengthen our economy, our society and our province.

Not a long time ago our government, the McGuinty government, introduced some kind of amendment to regulations of the disability act of Ontario that addresses the RDSP issue, because it's very important. I know the federal government implemented it in the last budget and we are trying to address it in such a fashion to support the people with disabilities—to have some kind of financial support when they need it.

I applaud the member from Dufferin—Caledon, but our amendment also went beyond Bill 94. We went to talk about volunteer payment, so it wouldn't be accounted if somebody works and makes some money on a volunteer basis and the money would be accounted—also, if somebody made a payment on behalf of the recipients with a disability, it also wouldn't be accounted. If you want to withdraw money, it won't count as income, so it also wouldn't be accounted. This is a plus to support the program, which is being put in place for a longer time. Also, if you are earning interest on those investments, it won't be accounted as income, therefore it wouldn't affect your eligibility for social assistance.

We did a lot of different initiatives in order to create such a mechanism to support people with disabilities in

Ontario. Bill 94: The member from Parkdale–High Park mentioned that we are against it. No. As a matter of fact, we went further than Bill 94, way further—five, six, 10 points ahead—because we believe in this issue. We have a minister who is passionate about this file. She got elected in 2003. Since she became the Minister of Community and Social Services, her passion and her goal to address this issue, her passion and her goal to make sure that all the people with a disability get a fair chance in our society, in our province—that's why, I believe, we came and we amended the regulations. We introduced it in order to go beyond, not to challenge the member from Dufferin–Caledon; we also put in process a motion a long time ago. We've been working toward that goal since we got elected in 2003. It was the time for it to be addressed and implemented in favour of people with a disability, to make sure that every person in the province of Ontario has the right to live with dignity and respect, has the right to live with some kind of ability to protect himself or herself.

Again, I don't see why not to support the member from Dufferin–Caledon. Her bill is a part of our agenda and part of our direction, so again I think I'm going to support the bill because it fits right into our agenda and into our direction.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I do appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 94, the Social Assistance Statute Law Amendment Act, which is An Act to amend the Ontario Disability Support Program Act, 1997 and the Ontario Works Act, 1997 to take into account funds held in or withdrawn from registered disability savings plans. It's quite a mouthful, and it sounds extremely complicated; but, in fact, it's quite simple yet extremely effective.

Before I discuss what Bill 94 aims to deal with and how it is so important, I would like to speak just briefly to some of the comments made by the member from Parkdale–High Park, because I certainly do appreciate her comments with respect to the effectiveness and the hard work that has been put into this by my colleague the member from Dufferin–Caledon, Sylvia Jones. There's no question that in her short time here—she was first elected in the 2007 election—she has made a tremendous impact, both as a member for her constituents of Dufferin–Caledon and as an extremely passionate supporter of people with special needs in her capacity as the official opposition's critic for the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Time and time again, I have seen her standing up for the people with special needs. I had the privilege of working with her this past summer on Bill 77, the developmental services bill, and I can tell you that she put a great deal of passion into that. She studied the file, and she knows her file extremely well. I think that the people of Dufferin–Caledon are extremely fortunate to have such a committed, passionate and gifted member.

Having said that, I would like to say that Bill 94 is no exception. She recognized there was something that needed to be done for people with special needs that this government was not addressing, and she took it upon herself to deal with it. I would submit that it is only because of her efforts that we have got the government to this point where they are accepting the premise of Bill 94 and what it intends to do, and I'm not really sure where we would be if she had not brought this bill forward at this time.

So I would like to speak just briefly about what this bill is all about and why Bill 94 is so important, and I would note that it was started with the federal Conservative government in the 2006 budget, where it was noted that parents and grandparents of a child with severe disabilities face important considerations. They need to find a way to secure their child's long-term financial security when they are no longer able to provide support.

In order to examine that issue, they set up a panel of three experts: Mr. James Barton Love, Mr. Laurie Beachell and Mr. Rémy Girard. Among them, these particular individuals had significant expertise in disabilities issues, in law, in taxation issues and also, perhaps most importantly, one of the panel members was the parent of a child with a significant disability. So they started with the premise that each family of a child with special needs faces important hurdles and hardships as they raise their child, as the child becomes an adult, and as they face the future together.

I would just like to comment that one of the other considerations is the family consideration, the fact that these families do stick together, that they want to do their best for their loved one with special needs, and this was noted in a report which indicated that there are also stories of love and of hopes and dreams. Those dreams are for a better life for a family member with a disability, and one of those hopes is that when they are no longer there to provide financial assistance to their loved one with the disability, that loved one will have available to him or her the financial resources to live a rich and fulfilling life.

When they set about the task of dealing with this issue, they did look at some actual case studies, and I think that when you look at the personal circumstances of the actual individuals that you're hoping to support with a bill like this, it really brings home to you the many difficulties that these families face and how terrifying it is for a parent to have to consider what their child's life is going to be like when they're no longer there to support them.

So I'd just like to read one case study that I think helps us all understand what this bill is all about. The story of Robert is a case in point:

"Robert is 29 years old and has Tourette's syndrome. He cannot read or write and does not understand numbers. He can be relatively independent, but he cannot live alone, as he needs someone to make sure that he eats properly and gets up in the morning. Robert has a job which he goes to every day. He does not consider himself

to be a person with a disability but rather, as a capable person with some limitations. Robert's mother died in 2004, and he wonders how long his father will live. Robert most certainly does not need to live in an institution and could live on his own quite independently with friends who would look after his meals and get him up in the morning for work.

"With his reading and writing limitations, Robert's employment is tenuous and, at best, his earning potential is very limited. Financial security would go a long way toward making Robert's future a good one and allow him to continue to be a happy and productive member of his community."

That's what the panel looked at, and that's where the registered disability savings plan came along and allowed people to collect income to allow their family member to be, if not self-sufficient, at least able to live a life of dignity in the community after they're gone.

What this plan allows is a maximum contribution of \$200,000. This contribution can be made over one year or over a period of years. There are no maximum contribution limits for the registered disability savings plan as there are for RRSPs. It allows not only the parents or family members of the individual to contribute; contributions can be made by relatives, friends, neighbours or perhaps even strangers, although I doubt that would happen, but it is something that allows the maximum resources to be put into the plan. The idea is that it's not a tax vehicle for an individual; it is a vehicle where savings can be collected for that person's benefit, which will then allow them to supplement whatever income they receive to be able to afford to live the way that many of us want to live in the community.

As the member from Parkdale-High Park quite rightly pointed out, people who live on government support plans—for example, the Ontario disability support program pays less than \$1,000 a month, and it's very, very difficult for people to live on this income, particularly in the city of Toronto. I would suggest—and I've heard from many of my own constituents—that it's very difficult in my riding of Whitby-Oshawa as well.

This is a vehicle that would allow them to work. The fact is also that almost 50% of people with significant disabilities rely on government plans to be able to live their lives. We're talking about hundreds of thousands of people across Canada who find themselves in this position. But the big problem, of course, was always that provincial support plans have maximum amounts that a person can earn per year before their disability support payments are clawed back on a monthly basis. It limits the amount you are able to earn on a part-time basis. It also limits the amount your family can leave to you.

For example, if the parents passed away and left a disabled beneficiary several hundred thousand dollars in the will, they would be cut off their disability support plan payments until all of their inheritance had been exhausted. They really need to have no assets to be able to collect disability support payments, and they would be disentitled to receive those benefits until all their inheritance was lost for basic living expenses.

What is sometimes done by those parents—I had the opportunity to do it in my previous life as a lawyer drafting wills—is that they draft what is called a Henson trust into a will, which allows families to leave money to family members on the basis that it's a discretionary trust. It therefore does not become an asset of that person and doesn't get clawed back if you receive those benefits as an inheritance. But that's really small comfort to parents in a situation where, when they pass away, they don't know for certain whether those amounts are going to be safeguarded for their child, and they want to make sure their child has a decent standard of living after they're gone.

Bill 94 provides for that. It provides for the disability savings plan amount—the corpus of the amount that's being left—not to be included as either an asset of the person or as income for the person, so it doesn't disentitle them to those benefits.

I could say that some of the provinces signed on to this federal initiative right away. British Columbia was one of the first signatories. Notably, Ontario is not. I would submit that this is something the member from Dufferin-Caledon has been working on for some time, and it really wasn't until she put forward her private member's bill that it really forced the government to deal with this situation, and thankfully they have. But I think it was important, and to give credit where credit is due, that this was at the initiative of the member from Dufferin-Caledon, who has worked long and hard, and you can see from some of the letters that she read to us the hard work that she went to and the work that she did with the stakeholders, all of whom, from the schizophrenia society to Community Living to Families for a Secure Future—the many organizations that have come forward to support this.

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I think this is really going to be something extremely meaningful for those many families across Ontario and, for that matter, across Canada because of the provinces that have already signed onto it. It's going to be able to make a real impact in their lives and for the lives of people with special needs, to allow them to have the dignity and the life that many of us take for granted.

I commend the member from Dufferin-Caledon for bringing this forward. We're extremely proud of her, and I know she's going to continue to work on behalf of those families into the future. As more and more bills come forward, she'll be there to deal with them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise in the House. First, let me congratulate the member from Dufferin-Caledon for bringing forward what I think is a wonderful bill and something that I think most, if not all, people in Ontario would support, because it does the right things.

It's pretty easy to get jaundiced around here. I guess people can get a little cynical, but what I like to think is that a member has done a lot of work here—a member of

a party that I don't belong to, but I think is doing a great job—and has brought forward a good idea to the House. Coincident to that, the government of the day, our party, has been working on a very similar bill, on a very similar amendment to our social service policy and legislation, and those two issues have been working concurrently in the best interests of the people of Ontario. I think that's a good thing. I think the work that the member did in Bill 94 is work, as I said, that would be supported by most reasonable people in the province of Ontario. I think what we have done as a government, and what we've recently passed as a government, adds to Bill 94—it goes much further than Bill 94 originally envisioned—and that, to me, is a good thing. I think that speaks volumes about the member that brought the bill forward, in that the intent of the bill that she brought forward was to help some people in our society who don't have the same advantages that many of us enjoy. At the same time, despite being a member of the opposition party, the government was working on initiatives to do much the same thing, and in fact, as I said, to exceed that.

I have a young gentleman who works in my office. His name is Stephen Muir. Stephen is a gentleman who has been dealing with an intellectual disability all his life, and Stephen has taught me a lot of lessons about inclusion. In the old days, we would have excluded somebody like Stephen. Stephen would not have been allowed to go to school, perhaps. He probably would not have eligible for employment opportunities. Even socially we used to exclude people like Stephen. I think we've got a better society today. I think we're starting to realize that sometimes the rules we passed, with the best of intentions, in the past, actually stand in the way of some of the things that we really should be able to do for people in our society who, as I said, don't have the same advantages as some of us.

I don't believe we need to take any lessons from the NDP in this regard. Compared to the NDP, when they had a chance to govern this great province, I think the record of this government is one which, when you look at the initiatives that we've been able to make and to put into place in the best interests of people in Ontario, since 2003, far, far exceeds anything that was ever done by the third party. Our party is quite proud of that and for good reason.

Interjection: Delivered results.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Yes, we've delivered results. It's easy to talk about something; it's something entirely different to go out there and deliver on that.

Stephen is a self-advocate. The young man that works in my office is a self-advocate. If you were to call my constituency office on a Wednesday or a Friday, more than likely Stephen would answer the phone. At the same time, Stephen plays a role in Community Living. What he does is, he goes out and he advocates for people who are in a similar situation to him and he advocates for people that he works with at Community Living. This is the type of bill that Stephen likes to see, because it gives him the freedom, it gives him the ability to move ahead on his own a little bit, to be a little bit more independent,

to have a little bit more cash to work with. Also, it gives his family the security of knowing that should something happen to his family, Stephen will be taken care of.

As I said at the start, it is not a time, especially at this season, to be cynical or jaundiced. In fact, I think it is a time to seek the best of each other, and I think we have seen the best from the member for Dufferin-Caledon in proposing a very good bill.

The advocates for people who are dealing with disabilities have come forward and they have advanced their own interests, both through the government and through the member as well.

The government's interests, the interests of the member from Dufferin-Caledon, the advocates' interests, and those of people who are dealing with a disability—all those interests have collided, and they have collided in a way that's working to the benefit of and to create opportunities for people in our province who are dealing with things that most of us around this room simply don't have to deal with.

Many of the advantages that are spoken to in Bill 94, as I said, are exceeded by the legislation that's been changed by the province, recently introduced by the province, so it goes as far as Bill 94 asks us to go and actually exceeds that.

I'd like to take this opportunity today to extend my thanks for the type of thinking that's been brought forward by the member from Dufferin-Caledon. My thanks to my own government for taking the sort of positive thinking that's been proposed by the private member's bill today, adding to that and doing it in a value-added way that's going to mean much more for the people who are going to be the recipients.

It's a time to work together. It's a time to congratulate each other for the work that's being done, I think, in a non-partisan way. Certainly, for the day's work, a lot of credit has to go to the member from Dufferin-Caledon for the bill that she's presented here today that is going to help a lot of people in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Dufferin-Caledon. Ms. Jones, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I appreciate the comments from my colleagues. I know that a number of the Liberal members have talked about the changes that are coming forward, but the reality is we haven't seen those changes—lots of promises, lots of words, a press release, but we haven't had the ability to review those regulations, to take them back to the stakeholders and ensure that is in fact what we are looking for.

Canada is the first country to address families' concerns for the financial well-being of their children's futures by implementing the registered disability savings plan. If the Ontario government agrees to let my bill pass, you will be showing, along with the federal government, leadership for disabled Ontarians. I urge each and every member to support Bill 94 so that RDSPs can truly improve the standard of living for thousands of residents.

I tabled Bill 94 to bring positive change for all Ontarians with a disability. I ask you to support my bill be-

cause it will entrench, through legislation, the guarantee that an RDSP asset will not impact disability benefits in 2009 and in the future. I ask you, on the last debate of the last day of the Ontario legislative session, to be non-partisan and to put the lives of others first.

On that note, I wish you and every member and families across Ontario a happy holiday season. I hope you have a wonderful Christmas with your family. I look forward to working again here for Dufferin–Caledon and all Ontarians in 2009. Thank you.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to, in the spirit of Christmas, stretch a point of privilege and ask members to join me in welcoming my constituency office staff, Humaira Hamayun and Magnolia Ma, who serve the constituents of Mississauga–Streetsville in seven languages.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): It's not a point of order, but welcome to Queen's Park.

The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

LIQUOR LICENCE AMENDMENT ACT (FRUIT WINE), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES PERMIS D'ALCOOL (VIN DE FRUITS)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will first deal with ballot item number 64, standing in the name of Mr. Runciman. Mr. Runciman has moved second reading of Bill 132, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: To the general government committee, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to the general government committee? So ordered.

ONTARIO ENERGY BOARD AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA COMMISSION DE L'ÉNERGIE DE L'ONTARIO

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item number 65, standing in the name of Mr. Ramsay. Mr. Ramsay has moved second reading of Bill 131, An Act to amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 with respect to retailers of electricity and gas marketers.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

Mr. David Ramsay: I ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private bills.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to that committee? Agreed. So ordered.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT (REGISTERED DISABILITY SAVINGS PLANS), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI A TRAIT À L'AIDE SOCIALE (RÉGIMES ENREGISTRÉS D'ÉPARGNE-INVALIDITÉ)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We'll now deal with the final ballot item today, ballot item number 66, standing in the name of Ms. Jones.

Ms. Jones has moved second reading of Bill 94. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Because the RDSP begins on January 1, 2009, and we will not be sitting again before that RDSP begins, I ask for unanimous consent to have third reading vote today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I just remind the honourable member that during private members' public business we can't actually do third reading today. But we can give consent that the bill be ordered for third reading. Is that what you would like to ask?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Yes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Do we have agreement that the bill be ordered for third reading? I hear a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The options now, to the honourable member: The bill could be referred to the committee of the whole of House, unless you'd like it to go to committee.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I would like it to be referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed? Agreed. So ordered.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated December 9, 2008, this House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. on Tuesday, February 17, 2009.

The House adjourned at 1622.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
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Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
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Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
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Broten, Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique
		Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture
		Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
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Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
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		Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
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Phillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
		Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
		Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliot, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (LIB)	Huron–Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Orazietti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener-Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin-Middlesex-London	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough-Agincourt	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres
		Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches-East York	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of International Trade and Investment / Ministre du Commerce international et de l'Investissement
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London-Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming-Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland-Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds-Grenville	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Tourism / Ministre du Tourisme
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier / Vice-premier ministre
		Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton-Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto-Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga-Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services / Ministre des Petites Entreprises et des Services aux consommateurs
van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (LIB)	Ottawa West-Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
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Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe-Grey	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Wimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

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Carol Mitchell, David Oraziatti
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Michael Prue, Tony Ruprecht
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Cheri DiNovo, Helena Jaczek
Dave Levac, Shafiq Qadri
Khalil Ramal, Laurie Scott
Peter Shurman
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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Chair / Président: Greg Sorbara
Howard Hampton, Greg Sorbara
Norman W. Sterling, David Zimmer
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